

# Fireteam Nebula: Stories of SPARTAN-IVs

by Last Ride Of The Valkyries

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Summary: Fireteam Nebula has just arrived on the UNSC Infinity for SPARTAN Operations (Ops). Thier mission - save the universe, one dead Elite at a time. I realised that I cannot have reviewer guided stories, so this repost from the original story (Fireteam Nebula: Stories of SPARTAN-IVs Like You) will not use reviews to create characters. I'm sorry if you submitted one and I cannot use it.

## 1. Prologue

\*\*A/N: Hello! Once again, sorry for the delete and repost. Please enjoy.\*\*

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><p>Prologue<p>

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><p>Stephenson pulled his knife out of the still twitching corpse. He stepped over the dead Grunt and crouched behind a rock. Stephenson looked back at the trail of bodies marking his path through the heavy jungle. He was just glad that he hadn't found any Prometheans. His objective was to eliminate hostile forces and destroy the research station that had been built in the area. Stephenson wasn't sure what exactly the outpost was for, but it couldn't be good.<p>

He peeked over the rock at the blue diamond marked objective. The outpost was made of that purple material that Stephenson knew some marines had dubbed Covenant Cocaine due to its almost addictive use by the Covenant. Stephenson himself didn't care that it was like a drug. All that mattered to him was that that alloy was bloody hard to

destroy, and destroying it was his goal.

Luckily, it was a short fifty metre sprint from the rock Stephenson was crouched behind to the station. The plain was flat and Stephenson knew that if he had to, he could mark the station with his comm site once he got there. It was almost too easy. Getting up, Stephenson sprinted forward, a blur of white with gold streaks. His last thought before his armour's shielding flared as a wave of plasma washed over him was that it had been too easy.

After that he stopped thinking and just reacted. SPARTANs may have been taught that acting was better than reacting, but every now and then, they needed to stop thinking and just react so that they could get to cover and figure out how to take charge. All of the training on reaction drilled into Stephenson's head was just enough to save him. He rolled, dodging a hail of green plasma bolts. From there he ducked, dove, and dashed back into cover behind the rock.

Peering out a second time, Stephenson saw the jaws of the trap he had missed on his initial scan - two armies of Grunts, each army led not by an Elite, but by Hunters, four in total. Shit. Stephenson smoothly pulled the sleek Designated Marksman's Rifle off of the mag-clamps on his back and felt as his Heads Up Display integrated with the gun, showing a targeting reticle and ammunition in the gun. Lining up a Grunt on the left in his crosshairs, Stephenson pulled the trigger. The gun bucked, the Grunt collapsed missing half its face, and Stephenson calmly lined the reticle up with the next target. Bang! Two down, thirty-eight to go. By this time, the Grunts had figured out what was happening and were running in paroxysms of terror while the Hunters decided that it would be more prudent to just lob plasma at the rock.

Crouching behind the rock wouldn't work forever, Stephenson knew. Eventually, the Hunters would decide to take the initiative and storm the rock, so whenever there was a lull as the Hunters charged their cannons, Stephenson would pick off a Grunt or two. Three minutes later, he was out of bullets, but there were only three Grunts left. Oh well.

After swapping to the toy he had been saving, Stephenson did the second stupidest thing in his life, the position for most stupid having been taken by volunteering for this godforsaken mission. He charged the Hunters on his left. Stephenson had almost given up the hope for survival that he had had when the metal rod in his hand finally flared into an energy sword. Even though he knew it wouldn't do much, Stephenson swung at the Hunter slightly closer to him, a ghostly trail of plasma vapor hanging in the air behind the blade. The Hunter stopped to shield itself from the deadly plasma and Stephenson used that moment to dash round the beast and sever a huge knot of orange worms lurking at the back of the armour, where the protection was worst. Stephenson was about to congratulate himself for a job well done when the dead Hunter's bond mate roared and swung its shield at him. He went flying and crumpled like a rag doll when he landed.

Stephenson wasn't entirely sure how he had gotten lucky enough to survive when he came to a few moments later, but he thanked his lucky stars that he had. The Hunters clearly thought he had not survived the blow, so Stephenson activated the Active Camo unit equipped to his suit and berated himself for not thinking of it earlier.

Crouching quietly up to the Hunter, he drew his energy sword and executed it with two deft swings. Unfortunately, the active camo unit chose then to fail and the other pair of Hunters was alerted of his survival by one of the Grunts. Stephenson ran up to the Grunt and snapped its neck, yanking the plasma pistol out of its grip as it died. Although not as effective as the DMR that he promptly dropped, the pistol could at least shoot.

An explosive bolt of plasma crackled a few centimetres away from his armour, and he ran for cover, shooting the newly obtained plasma pistol at the Grunts as he went. By the time Stephenson was safely behind cover, the playing field had reduced to just him and the other Hunter pair.

Activating the camo module, Stephenson crept out of hiding but quickly changed his mind when he saw the Hunters start charging their cannons. Now that they had figured out he had near invisibility, the Hunters were looking for it. Another great toy wasted. But rather than complain, Stephenson did what SPARTANs did best: he caused mayhem. All it took was a grenade near a pile of dead Grunts to ignite their methane supplies. The Hunters turned for just a second to investigate, but that second was all Stephenson needed. He ran forward and struck the closer Hunter across the back with a bar of plasma that killed it instantly. Its bond mate turned, and Stephenson smacked it with the energy sword. As the Hunter crouched and Stephenson tried to get at the Hunter's unprotected back, the energy sword turned back into a metal rod. Stephenson didn't have time to figure out what was wrong, so he shoved his final grenade into the fleshy mass of worms and ran like hell.

Glancing at his HUD, Stephenson quickly identified the reason for the sword's unexpected shutdown. It was empty. But before he could do anything, he heard an muffled boom and orange gore splattered all over his nice white and gold air assault armour.

Walking over to the research station, Stephenson chinned the button that would mark the current location of his comm signal and opened a channel for the first time since he had dropped into the dense jungle. "SPARTAN Hayden Stephenson to UNSC \_Infinity\_. Requesting bombardment at this location. Repeat, requesting bombardment at this location to eliminate target."

The garbled answer was, "I'd get to cover if I were you, SPARTAN, not even you can stand Archer missiles." Once safely behind his rock, Stephenson watched the fireworks and waited for a pickup.

As he climbed aboard the Pelican, Commander Palmer came on the line. "How would you feel about becoming the handler for a new fireteam?"

"And not tango with tangos? Sounds excellent."

"Then haul your ass up here to be debriefed on your new assignment - Fireteam Nebula."

"Yes ma'am."

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><p><strong>AN: First chapter ever . . . of all time. Please tell me

how I've done, and feel free to correct me on any mistakes.\*\*

## 2. To Infinity (and Beyond!)

\*\*A/N: I still feel really bad. If you could see me, I would be rubbing my head sheepishly. But that's not the point of this note. I will be making all my own characters now, so if you feel that I am not characterising them properly, please point me in the right direction.\*\*

\*\*On a side note, I rated this T because I assume that you have played Halo and splashes of fluorescent blue blood do not bug you. However, if you feel that I have rated the story too low, please tell me. I don't want to have the admins freeze my story . . . again. Thanks, and enjoy.\*\*

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><p>To <em>Infinity<em> (and Beyond!)

\* \* \*

><p>Arianna Pearlman paced back and forth over and over again. Cryo was supposed to be dreamless sleep, but it had never been dreamless for her. The glassing of Madrigal was just too powerful of a memory. Sure, she had been seven, but the loss of the life she had always known was simply too horrid. Arianna could remember glancing out the window of the escape craft she had been crammed into. She had watched as her little town became nothing but a brown dot before the purple behemoth had obscured her vision. When it moved, the landscape was just a reflection of the sky into which she had fled.<p>

Arianna had refused to enter the cryo-pod and watch her life end over and over again for the month long Slipstream trip to the UNSC \_Infinity\_ so that she and the rest of her new fireteam could aid in the battles of Requiem.

She had joined the SPARTANs not in a fit of anger, but because of grief. Arianna Pearlman knew the chances of getting revenge on the bastards that had vitrified her life were infinitesimal, and the monsters that had ordered the genocide were dead. This was a fight to save others from knowing her grief, although far too many knew that pain.

Arianna was so lost in thought that even with her new augmentations, she didn't hear the doors whoosh open and failed to acknowledge the other's presence until he said, "Up already? You rise fast, considering that the pods opened just a few minutes ago and you already look ready for combat." Arianna instinctively looked at the simple purple and white armour that complimented her almost violet eyes before turning to face the man.

He was wearing only the black, elastic undersuit and had light brown skin that didn't quite match his gruff voice. Heavy brows were underlined by brown eyes the colour of caramel and his thick black

hair was cut haphazardly and definitely longer than regulation, but then again, so was Arianna's light, silvery-blond hair that hung around her shoulders in ringlets. Arianna simply replied, "Without a helmet? That would just be stupid."

This other SPARTAN, who must be part of her new fireteam, Nebula, just smiled and clarified. "I only meant that suiting up takes longer than the pods have been open for."

"Oh. Well, I don't sleep well. Too many bad memories."

"I'm sorry. Name's Raj Kahn. Am I correct in assuming that you too are in Fireteam Nebula?"

Nodding her pale head so that her entire petite form seemed to bounce, Arianna answered, "SPARTAN Pearlman, but off the battlefield, I'm Arianna. Nice to meet you," and extended her hand for a shake, which he enthusiastically returned before dashing off.

Arianna was confused until a different, less gendered, voice behind her said, "Don't mind him. He just wanted to get a chance to put on his armour now that I'm done." Arianna pivoted to see a tall man in black armour, a Gungnir helmet tucked under the arm not extended for a shake. As she grasped his hand, he said, "SPARTAN Reynolds of the newly formed Fireteam Nebula, and you are?"

Even as she replied, with a simple, "Arianna Pearlman, also of Fireteam Nebula," Arianna noticed that despite the white scar in the shape of a claw running from just below his eye to his upper lip on the left side of his tanned face, his smile still reached his baby-blue eyes. Reynolds's sandy blonde hair was almost as messy and long as Raj's, and he seemed quite similar. However, there was military in Reynolds's voice that Raj didn't have. That much was quite obvious.

"So, what's your speciality?" Raj's voice was still obviously his despite the muffling by his E.O.D. suit with two shades of red. His penchant for red carried over into his Solar visor color. "I'm good with pretty much any alien tech on a battlefield, so the marines made me part of the bomb squad. They completely failed to realize the other uses for understanding technology on the battlefield. Maybe the SPARTAN program will give me a chance at hacking their computers."

It was pretty obvious that Kahn would ramble on if he was allowed to, so Reynolds cut in. "I like heavy weaponry," he said, holding up his Gungnir helmet. "It won't get up if it's blown into a million pieces. And the UNSC \_Infinty \_has an AI named Roland for hacking alien tech."

Arianna took the opportunity to inform the others that, "I like mobility and can fly pretty much anything. I wonder if I can be Nebula's air support?"

Arianna was quite clearly losing her edge because a new voice, this one light and almost ready to burst into song said, "According to our pilot, there are four hundred eighty-one working birds, so I'm sure that you can borrow one on occasion, but you'll probably want another occupation." The pivoting of the three SPARTANS to see the new arrival was perfectly synchronized. The woman decked out in sea-foam

green armour with spongy yellow trim held a Venator helmet cradled in her arms. "But you can't have close quarters combat, because that's my job."

"How did you know that? I'm Raj Kahn, the pretty lady is Arianna Pearlman, and Mr. Strong and Silent in the black tux-" At that, Reynolds let out a snort while Raj continued, "is No-First-Name Reynolds." Raj held out his hand for a shake, and the mystery woman tucked her helmet under one arm before taking the shake.

Turning to shake Reynolds's hand, the woman said, "My name is Brady, Juliette Brady." As she took the step forward to shake Arianna's hand, she replied to Raj's question. "I know that because the pilot told me to come get you so that we can board one of those four hundred eighty-one Pelicans that Infinity sent over to pick us up." Juliette finished shaking Arianna's hand and then wrapped her dark red hair into a french braid so that she could tuck it into her helmet, which she slid over her dark, pine green eyes, leaving only the memory of her face and its multiple small white scars.

Reynolds jammed his helmet on his head, ignoring how it messed with his hair. He followed right behind Juliette as she led the way to the Pelican. Raj looked over at Arianna as she hesitated before grabbing her own purple and white Air Assault helmet with Sunspot visor off the table. The two of them walked out of the room and followed about three metres behind Brady and Reynolds. As they walked, Arianna fiddled with her hair, trying to fit it under her helmet without resorting to a ponytail. At last, she took her hair back into a single bunch and slid that into the helmet, her head following. She knew this would give her "helmet hair", but Arianna was frustrated and just wanted to vacuum-seal her armour should the Pelican decompress. Her hands itched thinking about it, and Arianna knew the Pelican would make it if she flew it. The mystery pilot, not so much.

Once up the ramp, Arianna and Raj discovered the fifth member of Fireteam Nebula. A figure in ice blue Deadeye armour with turquoise trim and a Midnight visor sat polishing a sniper rifle. "Guess this is our sniper." Raj and Arianna each extended a hand to shake.

The figure didn't even look up. Reynolds, who was sitting directly across from it said, "Pearlman, Kahn. SPARTAN Quin is deaf," and made a flurry of motions with his hands while finishing his explanation. "He can read lips, but not through helmets, so I would suggest taking them off or learning sign language."

Quin looked up. He set his sniper rifle against the wall and took off his helmet, revealing light brown, almost amber, eyes filled with pain in a perfectly symmetrical face the color of a peach framed by gentle brown curls. His lips parted in an almost baby-like fashion, and the carefully formed words matched the young, careful tone he used. His voice was slow and hesitant as he said, "Marcus told me that neither of you can use sign language. My name is Edward Quin." This time he extended a hand which both Raj and Arianna shook.

Raj took off his helmet and said in a clear voice, "I am Raj Kahn and this is Arianna Pearlman. Have you met Juliette?" Quin nodded, clearly uncomfortable with talking. He and Raj put their helmets back on, as per regulations for space flights. Edward returned to servicing his rifle.

Juliette walked into the back from the pilot's and said, "Buckle up, because we are a green!" Arianna slipped into a seat next to Edward, Raj strapped in next to Reynolds, and Juliette sat down on Arianna's other side.

Raj jumped right into a conversation with Reynolds. "Marcus, huh." Marcus just shrugged. "Aren't there implants that allow people to hear?"

Marcus doesn't even sign Edward to ask him. "There are, but they hurt so much that it isn't worth it." Then he mutters so quietly that even with their augmentations, the SPARTANs have trouble hearing, "At least, that's what she said."

But Raj picked up on that sentence. "Who is she?"

A moment of pause before Marcus answers. "\_Was\_ she. My best friend couldn't hear."

Juliette jumps in. "So that's why you know sign language. But why do you say was?"

A pained expression twisted Marcus's face and he went from happy to sad in an instant. "I was fourteen and she was thirteen when the Covenant arrived in the Epsilon Laundra system. Before we could escape, they had touched down all over, looking for something. Cara and I were at the local grifball court when a squad of Jackals stumbled upon us. There were other kids, some of whom died in the chaos, but a few made it. Cara couldn't hear the commotion and was cornered by a Jackal. I did the only thing I could think to do. I tackled the Jackal and beat it to death, but not before it gave me this." He traced his hand over his helmet, right where his scar ran, like he was lost in the memory and couldn't feel the cool metal of his helmet, just hot blood pouring out the gash. When Marcus started his narration again, his voice, which had gotten steadily closer to breaking, became racked with sobs. "When I turned to lead Cara to our house and a way off our doomed planet, she was gone. No charred remains, no bloodied smear, nothing. Although I know it is likely that she just ran a little ways before the Covenant caught and killed her, I hold on to the hope that Cara somehow survived like I did. It's a foolish habit and I - I try not to think that way."

Arianna leant over and tapped his knee to get his attention. "Hey. It's never wrong to hope. Don't think that she was. Think that she is. I watched my planet get glassed, which is why I can't sleep in cryo. The memories are just too strong, the dreams too real. But don't give up hope. I pray day in and day out that I will somehow be reunited with my neighbors from back on Madrigal. You just need to hope that you will see Cara again."

The Pelican was silent for the rest of the flight.

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><p><strong>AN: Yeah, I know, almost no action. But this chapter needed to be written, and I couldn't think of a way to get the characters set up in a heated firefight.\*\*

### 3. Pure White Silence

**\*\*A/N:** Hello! I don't have a schedule for posting, so if I ever take a long time to post, chances are that I am just doing something else. Right now, for example, I am trying to get a story published in Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine. But enough about me. Please enjoy!\*\*

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><p>Pure White Silence<p>

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><p>Edward perked up when he felt the steady vibration of the Pelican change. He quickly took the Revelation II scope off of his sniper rifle and put it in its carry case. As he began to break his rifle into the stock, trigger, barrel, and silencer, Edward noticed a comm channel open. He paid it no attention and continued to stow his rifle for transport, until he read the tag. Commander Palmer.<p>

This time, he looked up at Marcus sitting across from him. Marcus noticed the helmet had come up to look and made a flurry of hand signs that not even a SPARTAN could keep up with without practice. Edward's Deadeye helmet automatically focused on the motion and doubled the zoom. It was a cool feature and quite useful when sniping, or at least it had been during the times he had had to practice with his sniper rifle. Technically, it wasn't his sniper rifle, but when he had been told to get ready for departure, he just couldn't leave it at the shooting range back on Earth. So he had taken it.

But for the moment, he needed to focus on Marcus's hand signs. /Hello Quin. SPARTAN Palmer wants us to be ready as soon as we get off the Pelican, which will be landing shortly at hangar 10.\

/What for?\

/I'm not sure, but be ready.\

The Pelican's vibration changed just enough that someone accustomed to feeling sound rather than hearing it could detect the change. The Pelican was inside Infinity, a fact that the others figured out only when the engine was cut off entirely.

As the ramp lowered, Juliette stood up and led the way off the Pelican, her bright, pastel coloured Venator armour glinting in the harsh flood lights built into the ceiling of the dock. Raj and Arianna hastily stood up in their red and purple armour as they tried to follow right behind Juliette. Marcus and Edmund brought up the rear, black Gungnir armour contrasting sharply with ice-blue Deadeye. Commander Palmer met them at the bottom of the ramp, leading a SPARTAN in full Wetwork armour, coloured white with golden highlights. A Legendary visor completed the deal. As Palmer opened her mouth to speak, Edmund got ready to lip-read. 'I'm sorry to cut the meet-and-greet short, but I need you to understand each other



well, so SPARTAN Stephenson here is going to give you the grand tour of the War Games deck. I want you all to figure out the fighting styles of others and how to compliment the varied fighting styles. I picked each of you for a reason.'

Stephenson took off his helmet, revealing deep-set grey eyes and hair so dark that it was almost a deep, dark blue. Looking directly at Edmund, he opened his mouth slowly and deliberately so that he could lip-read. 'I looked over all of your files, and each of you seems capable. However, I must wonder why you didn't accept the ear grafts, Quin. They aren't like the crude civvie implants, you know. They don't hurt once the stem cells have been accepted. Now come on, the War Games deck is this way.'

As Stephenson walked away, Edward thought about his answer. Why had he said no to augmentations? As he remembered when they had offered to fix his ears when they did the augmentations, an answer came to him. Despite the fact that unlike the civilian implants, this military grade restructuring was one that he would never have ever been able to afford, Edward had said no. He was so used to the silence that noise would be too much. With a silent world, it was easy to disappear into the scope of his sniper rifle and focus somewhere far distant, somewhere with simple rules. Point gun at enemy. Pull trigger. Edmund wished all life was like that sometimes. He opened his mouth and carefully tasted each word that rolled past his tongue so that he knew it was right before it was said. "I have grown up in silence, and in silence I shall die. There would be too many stimuli if I could hear."

Stephenson nodded, not really listening, and then put his helmet back on. Edward saw the crew members that Nebula passed leaned in close and started to whisper. Edward was glad for silence just then. He was sure the other SPARTANS heard snatches of the whispering but never the whole conversation. He was glad he couldn't hear the words, but hoped they weren't hateful anyways. The word freak ran back and forth through his head. He saw it spelled in fire, the twisting tongues of flame searing the idea into his mind with burning pain, the smoke obscuring all else. Only the memory of a cruel boy with a big face, heavy brows and a long forehead. Although he looked as bright as a cockroach's tea room, Edward remembered his ten-year-old archenemy's hands, twisted into a deformed monster that he recognized as /Freak,\ the ugliness of the word matching the ugliness of the sign. \_That \_was the real reason he had denied implants. Although he doubted that Danny even remembered him except as the shy, quiet kid who couldn't hear his taunts and insults, Edward felt this need to prove that he could succeed without ears.

He was shaken out of his reprieve by Marcus gently signing, /We're here.\ Edward relaxed. These people had all had their share of problems. Even if he couldn't hear them, he had had to learn how to read lips and faces and people. Everyone carried themselves tall through the haunting ghosts of pain, but only because they had support. He would give his, whether with a sniper rifle a kilometre away or with a comforting word, despite the unnaturalness of the sounds he couldn't hear pouring out his mouth, and they would give theirs.

He quickly signed back, /Thank you.\ He strapped himself into the restraints so that he wouldn't injure himself and watched as the covering came down. He closed his eyes and counted to ten, just like

he had reviewed on the flight over. He was fairly certain the others had too.

When he opened his eyes, the sun was glaring off of his visor, which had polarised automatically. Edward stood atop a rocky outcropping that ran parallel to a sheer cliff face. In below him stretched rolling hills, interrupted only by dip with metal girders. Off to one side lay a cave, which Edward idly noted would be useful for sniping if the outcropping upon which he stood became infested. Past all of this lay a ravine, which wrapped around and opened up, revealing crashing ocean breakers. The sides of the canyon before it opened up were bounded by a pair of metal staircases, one on each side. Up the staircases lay an open metal structure, from under which a waterfall cascaded.

A video of Stephenson popped up in the upper-left-hand-corner of Edward's visor. The helmet was off, and Edward lip-read, 'Hello SPARTANS. This is a simple game called Slayer. It was designed for all-purpose training, so your only goals are to kill enemy SPARTANS and not die. The objective here is to learn to work as a group, so I have received authorisation to give you whichever weapon you desire. Good luck, and kick Fireteam Opalescent's ass for me.'

A set of green markers popped up in the center of Edward's helmet. His eyes focused on the sniper rifle icon, and once the trackers in his helmet determined which one he was looking at, the sniper rifle picture glowed brighter. A thud reverberated through his boots a moment later when a burnished weapons pod cratered the ground in front of him. The side shot off and SPARTAN Quin grabbed the sniper rifle out of the pod. He felt the grip and laid down on the rock, starting the hunt for his first target.

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><p><strong>AN: I realise that there is a discontinuity about the War Games, but I think that there are multiple War Games rooms, and this one uses a slightly different design.\*\*

#### 4. If at First You Don't Succeed,

\*\*A/N: I have had a hectic week, so I just finished episode three of Spartan Ops. It occurs to me that since I don't want to fill the story with platitude (some non-actiony bits are required, however, because I want actual characters, not mindless killing machines), if I get all the way to the end of Season One in my story, I may have to stop updating and start on another story.\*\*

\*\*Once I catch up to the actual story, I will mark this as complete but still update as new levels come out. Enjoy the War Games, and please tell me if you think the fighting is unrealistic.\*\*

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><p>If at First You Don't Succeed,<p>

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><p>SPARTAN Brady wore a predatory grin as she gripped the hilt of her combat knife. Sure, she had selected a DMR, but that was just for those times she couldn't reach an enemy.<p>

Brady had appeared in a cave on an island with nothing but her sea-foam green armour with pastel yellow highlights. Luckily, combat knives were integrated into all armour, so Brady had that to match her Venator suit. Brady sighed, wishing that there had been a chance to choose the armour abilities she had learned about aboard the UNSC Righteous Savior en route to the Infinity. They had all looked neat, but the one that had really caught Juliette Brady's eye was a stealth enhancement based off of the invisibility generators some of the Elites wore.

But rather than worry about things she couldn't have, SPARTAN Brady slunk out of the cave, keeping low to the ground. She supposed that drabber colours would have been more effective for hunting silently through the bogs, deserts, jungles, and arctic wastelands of Requiem, but the pastels had looked so neat when juxtaposed that Brady just couldn't bring herself to part with them. Of course, she had also been banking on the idea that she would have Active Camo to use.

Keeping an eye on her motion tracker, Brady crept past a Warthog idling in the grass. She didn't need it, not if she was in a contained location like this. In fact, the last time she had used a Warthog was the Battle of Earth near New Mombasa, when deployments of enemy troops had been scattered everywhere from New Mombasa to Voi. As a non-SPARTAN, she wasn't sure how she had survived going into firefights to kill Covenant, and even the Flood.

That had been traumatic. The mere memory of the feeling of tentacles crawling into her mouth, on her face, cutting, slicing, and slashing made Brady shiver. Adrenalin had kicked in, and she had popped both infection pods that had attacked, but not before they left their mark. Brady was just glad she hadn't gone the way of her lieutenant.

As CO, he had demanded to go in first. He'd come out with tentacles and a broken neck, infection pod resting just below where his Adam's apple had been. She had been the first to react, drawing the knife in her boot and cutting the infection pod right out of Lieutenant Earlsom's neck. He had collapsed then, his greenish skin twitching.

Brady shook herself out of the reprieve and snuck into a deep depression in the ground. It had struts made out of a foreign metal to support the ditch. Like the namesake of her Venator armour, she lay in wait, the perfect hunter. From her initial survey, SPARTAN Brady knew the ditch was a prime spot to hide from sniper fire, and if SPARTAN Quin was any good, an enemy would try to use this as a respite. She didn't have to wait long. She heard a muffled shot and saw a figure clad in brown rush into her ditch. Brady didn't take time to look at the armour, because her radar had already pinged the movement with a red dot. At the last possible second, she stepped out of cover and clotheslined the runner. It, or he, as she saw, went down. Hard. Brady rushed forward, her knife a pair of vicious jaws.

It plunged easily through the shield and the armour. She saw a small spurt of blood and a ping informed her that she had received ten points. As Brady began to disappear into her hidey-hole, she felt her shields drain and saw a set of pink armour jumping as it shot three round bursts at her. Brady almost grinned. Bad move. The bright colour was more than enough for Quin to see, and a single bullet collapsed the shields and shattered the skull of Brady's attacker.

Sadly, the dead pink body was like a marker for the enemy, and a spray of bullets pelted Brady's already weakened shield, breaking it. Her last thought before the ravine faded was Shit.

The glass tube around Brady played a video of her demise, recorded on her opponent's helmet camera. Rather than watch the video, Brady jumped back into the virtual reality, noting only that her old hiding spot had been compromised.

She materialised behind a rocky bluff. When she turned her head, SPARTAN Brady saw SPARTAN Quin lying prone on top of one of the rocks, his ice-blue armour a dead giveaway of his position. Literally. Focused as he was on the scope of his sniper rifle, he did not see the man in dark green Vanguard armour sneaking up on him, and deaf as he was, he could not hear the man in dark green Vanguard armour sneaking up on him.

Brady let out a strangled cry as she whipped the DMR off of her shoulder, knowing it would be too late. She shot, felt the rifle buck, but it was too late. Quin's armour blew apart, the shotgun pellets shattering the metal alloy plates and ripping him to shreds. In desperation, she pulled her knife out of the sheath on her right ankle and threw it at the man.

Shotguns were loud and not her style, but they had a better range than a combat knife normally had. Furthermore, the man was close enough to shotgun her before she could break him with her DMR. Really, throwing her knife was her best bet.

The blade sunk into the man's thigh, slowing him down. As he limped toward Brady, she backpeddled, firing her DMR at the man. Slowly, his shields broke, but he had pressed her against a wall. And she hadn't bothered to load the DMR fully, so she was out.

She was backed into a corner, outgunned, and out of hope when she heard a loud shrieking noise from up above. Plasma rained down even as the man pumped a shotgun blast into her face.

This time, Brady watched the helmet cam video. She saw her own cowering self and imagined her own frightened expression through the visor. Even as the picture limped over to her, the camera recorded that shrieking noise. Plasma began to eat away at the man's shields as he pulled the trigger. Then he looked up to see what Juliette's green eyes had missed. A Banshee, mostly intact, was doing a strafing run. As the camera fell to the ground angled upwards, she heard a loud, "Whoo!" come from the aircraft. The voice was unmistakably SPARTAN Pearlman's.

Brady shrugged inside her War Games pod. Guess Pearlman found air support. Then Brady jumped back into the fray.

This time she appeared on the other side of the canyon. Brady was in the middle of the metal platform, facing the ravine. She quickly dashed out of the open and behind a wall built into the back side of the structure, only to find it already occupied. Without the time to choose a weapon, she chucked a fragmentation grenade into the little area and got out of there. The other person wasn't so lucky. A body in bright yellow Protector armour flew out of the hidey-hole, which Brady promptly entered.

Drawing her knife, she peeked around the corner, getting ready to lie in wait. A minute passed, and then another. Brady watched as the scores in the lower-right-hand-corner of her HUD changed. She was tempted to run into the open, but that was dangerous without Active Camo. She never knew when an enemy would blow by.

Brady was beginning to give up hope that the structure would see more action than a Banshee exploding overhead when Pearlman was struck by a rocket. Suddenly, two figures in black climbed the stairs to her left, the one with the Infiltrator helmet forcing the one wearing Gungnir armour. Neither seemed to be firing, but Brady knew they were so close that she would never get a clean shot with her DMR. Deciding to extricate herself from the defensive position, she ran up to the fighters, pinging SPARTAN Reynolds so that he would know she was coming. He did not hesitate to drop into a roll, allowing Brady to sweep her gun onto the other fighter. She shot to get his attention and then ran, leaping at the man, who clearly had not expected half a tonne of SPARTAN to crash onto him. Her knife went through his helmet like butter, leaving a jagged eye hole over the right eye.

"Thanks," Reynolds said as he picked a rocket launcher off of the opponent's corpse. "My Spartan Laser ran out of charge, so I had to stay close enough that he couldn't use explosives, but far enough away to dodge swinging fists."

"No problem. Let's stick together for a while."

"Sounds good to me." The pair slowly descended the stairs, cautious of movement. A flash of pink caught both sets of eyes. It soon solidified into a SPARTAN wearing Soldier armour. One rocket to her feet was all it took to bring her down.

Hiking along the path toward the rocky hills led only to disaster. A shot from a sniper rifle echoed nearby, and the two SPARTANs glanced swiftly to their left. A figure in red E.O.D. armour lay twitching on the ground. Instinct took over, Brady rushed to Kahn's side, and pressed her gloved hand to the bloodied patch, trying to staunch the bleeding. It took Reynolds's firm hand on her shoulder to remind her she was exposing herself to a sniper. It had all seemed so calm, and that was the problem. Kahn was bait, and they were the naive victims of a trap.

As she dodged left and right, Brady was glad that their sniper didn't appear to be quite as focused as Quin. This sniper had clipped her shoulder, but she was still running. Reynolds launched both rockets in the twin tubes in the general direction of the sniper. There were two explosions, but Reynolds did not get any points.

When she heard the Banshee again, Brady saw the yellow dot on her radar that represented Pearlman. She glanced up and saw the Banshee going from low over the ground to high in the air. It looked about to

stall, in fact. Instead, the yellow dot turned red, and a purple figure fell out of the Banshee, flailing its arms as it tried to right itself. Focused as they were on Pearlman, hoping she wouldn't die, SPARTANs Reynolds and Brady didn't notice the Banshee right itself and launch a deadly fuel rod cannon at them. The green bolt exploded at the same time as Pearlman slammed into the ground. Without enough stopping force to prevent it, whoever had skyjacked the Banshee had received a triple kill.

Those thirty extra points were enough to push the opponents over the line, six hundred points to four ninety. As the glass pods rose and the restraints came undone, the ten SPARTANs in the restraints regained consciousness. Striding to the screen in the center of the room, Juliette noticed that the man in brown armour was wearing Hazop armour, a detail she had failed to notice initially. The man in Vanguard armour said, "Congrats, Danny. Skyjacking that Banshee and then getting two more kills so that we could win, that was style." The man in brown nodded almost listlessly as he gave his thanks.

Edward sounded quite panicked as he asked, "Danny who?"

His inability to hear as he stumbled over the simple sentence was missed by the pink girl who said, "Danny Whitshire. Why do you care about the last name of my boyfriend?" Marcus quickly signed this information to Edward.

The motion was not lost on the man in brown, who made a quick motion with his own hands. Juliette, Arianna, and Raj could not read it, but it was clear that Marcus wanted to kill Danny Whitshire. Edward, on the other hand, recoiled backwards as if stung.

Marcus tore off his helmet and beamed Danny, who, not expecting it, fell over. Marcus strode over and tore off Danny's helmet, his blue eyes hard as he inspected the enemy's face. His fist came down once, breaking the nose.

Eight SPARTANs stood shocked for a moment before Sarah Palmer strode in and grasped Danny and Marcus, one in each hand, and dragged them out of the room. Calling over her shoulder in a clearly angry voice, she said, "Opalescent, Nebula. Head to the briefing room and get ready for insertion. I want you both ready to fight as soon as Reynolds, Whitshire, and I have a chance to talk. Play nice, or its a week of cleaning the latrines."

Juliette stooped to grab Marcus's helmet at the same time as the man in Vanguard armour went for Danny's. He started a conversation. "What the hell was that?"

After Raj took off his helmet and repeated the question for Edward, he answered, being careful to enunciate every word this time. "That was Danny Whitshire, a bully who teased me for being deaf. I had hoped he was no longer a part of my life."

The girl in pink said, "The Danny I know would never tease someone."

When Edward ignored her action, Raj cut in, E.O.D helmet already tucked under his arm. "Edward Quin is deaf, so please take off your helmets so that he can lip-read, since Marcus, Edward, and apparently

Danny are the only ones who know sign language."

Edward clarified. "As far as I know, Danny only knows one word. Freak. That's how he got to me in elementary school. I was the shy deaf kid, and he was the loud bully. Mean, but smart."

The man in green tore off his Vanguard helmet, revealing light red hair and numerous freckles. "Danny never told us that! Nice knife, by the way. I'm Logan McCormac, Whitney Donelly is the girl," She looks slightly miffed by her title. " the guy in yellow is our sniper, Jesus Rodriguez, and Blake Pintelli in the black is addicted to rocket launchers."

Raj responded smoothly. "I'm Raj Kahn, our resident demolitions expert. The fine lady in purple is Arianna Pearlman, Edward Quin in the blue is our deaf sniper, Juliette Brady is Miss 'Nice knife', and you've already met Marcus 'I-wanna-punch-someone-in-the-face' Reynolds."

Whitney hesitatingly asked, "Marcus . . . Reynolds?" In response to Raj's statement.

Arianna answered, "Yes, why?"

"Because I know someone who wants to meet him. I'll tell her to meet us in the briefing room." Whitney strode out of the room, and everyone trailed behind her as she led the way to the briefing room.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>AN: It had to be done. Nebula is going to loose to trained SPARTANS, Edward has to face his demons (I crack myself up sometimes), and I wanted Marcus to punch someone in the face.\*\*

## 5. Then Punch Someone in the Face

\*\*A/N: Hello! Because I can. That's why. But it is hard to come up with locations for missions and reasons to undertake them sometimes. Pity me. Actually, don't, because I have several ideas already.\*\*

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\* \* \*

><p>Then Punch Someone in the Face<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Marcus couldn't believe it. When he'd been carried out of the room for fighting under one of Commander Palmer's arms, he wasn't sure what to expect, but it wouldn't have been this. She'd simply said in an exasperated voice, "Boys will be boys, and sometimes they act like toddlers." Then she'd left the two of them in a preschool. Why a military ship would have one, Marcus would never know, but when a squad of ODSTs came to jeer at him, Marcus resolved not to become

the ship's laughingstock again. So he had ignored Danny, who sat on the toy oven, using a "cleaning rag" to nurse his nose. He didn't appear to be in much pain, but the blood splattering his face was probably unprofessional.<p>

When the metal blast doors guarding the preschool slid open, Danny hopped up and walked out with a purpose. Marcus wasn't sure what to do, so he followed behind Danny. A few twists and turns later, the pair came to a door with a simple metal plaque announcing it as the "Debriefing Room".

Danny waited as it whooshed open and he strode through. Marcus was relieved to see the glint of red E.O.D. armour, signifying that he was at the right place. He had heard Palmer say they were due in the briefing room, but was glad for reassurance. Marcus strode through the still open door . . . and was punched in the face.

Marcus spluttered as everyone looked up at the sharp crack. Danny snickered then winced as the action hurt his nose. Marcus put a hand on his nose, testing and then popping it back into place. \_Not broken, at least. \_Even though the bigger hurt was to his dignity, Marcus still felt it appropriate to ask incredulously, "Could you not have waited for me to put on my helmet?"

The figure that had punched him, a woman, by the looks of it, was wearing deep cerulean Circuit Oceanic armour with jet-black highlights and an Engineer visor. Her voice was distorted as she said, "That's for leaving me." A moment passed as the woman took off her helmet. Soft, light green eyes under thin eyebrows, plump lips, a pale face, all topped by rich, chocolatey brown, voluminous hair that hung straight down to the small of her back. How it fit under the helmet, Marcus would never know, but when she hugged him, the hair was soft as satin, just like he remembered. Her voice whispered so that only he could hear it, the currents tickling his ear. "That's for coming back."

As she ruffled his sandy hair, Marcus finally found his voice. "Cara. What the hell happened?"

She grinned at him as she said, "Tell you later. Palmer would have my ass in the Triple-P if she caught me in here." As she walked out, she quickly signed, /Ventilation shafts above C-Deck. I'll find you.\

Marcus decided not to mention C-Deck, and instead ventured to ask, "Triple-P?"

Whitney responded, "Palmer's Preschool Programme. The idea is that by inviting ODSs to come jeer at SPARTANs sitting in a preschool, total humiliation will be the reason to avoid messing up."

"I certainly felt foolish sitting there, even though I was an ODS at one point."

Danny grabbed his helmet off of the table, using the helmet to hide his hand from Marcus as he signed, /Freak,\ at Edward. As he jammed it onto his head, Whitney, who looked disappointed, leaned in close and whispered something to Danny. He scowled and jabbed a finger into the Recruit visor of Whitney's Soldier armour, whispering something back. She got up and switched seats with Logan, who appeared to be



the de facto leader of Opalescence. Marcus sighed, wondering just how splintered both fireteams would become as he accepted his helmet from Juliette.

He had just sat down when Palmer walked in. "Okay ladies, since the Forerunners seem to like things in pairs, you two will be having the same objective, just different deployment zones. Opalescent, heads or tails?"

She flipped the coin and as it spun end over end, Jesus called out, "Tails, please," in his deep, well accented voice. Rather than catch it, Palmer let it fall, the drop making a metallic clink when the coin hit. It rotated for a moment before settling on the side with Martin Walsh, the 2345 leader of the U.N., staring blankly into space.

"Heads. Your choice Nebula. Magic Forerunner button in the ruined city or magic Forerunner button in the desert?"

Raj quickly jumped in. "I want an adventure in a ruin. I'll just pretend it's the Coliseum."

Everyone just shrugged. Marcus quickly signed to Edward, /Our goal is to activate a Forerunner artifact in a ruined city\. Edward shrugged as well.

Palmer took out a picture as she said, "Then you have the desert, Opalescent. This is the artifact. Find it, kill everything, turn it on, and we should have access to some basic surveillance on Requiem." The picture was of a metal pole with a hard-light panel on top. The pole had bits of metal sticking out of the sides at different heights, lengths, and positions around the circumference. A few millimetres past the end of each stylised bulge a wafer-thin metal ring wrapped around the pole. There were fourteen rings in all. "Head to your birds. Your handlers will know what to do."

Stephenson stood outside the room when Marcus led the way out. He said, "Nebula, from now on, hangar 10 is yours to use for operations. Also, I heard that Pearlman here likes to fly. Excellent work in that Banshee."

Arianna mumbled a quiet, "Thank you," and appeared embarrassed, despite the Sunspot visor.

Stephenson continued. "As such, the keys are in the ignition, but don't waste bullets on ground forces. Save that for the big bad SPARTANs going dirtside."

That time Arianna's, "Thank you!" was excited, not embarrassed. She sprinted all the way to hangar 10.

The Pelican roared and shot out of the hangar, Stephenson the only one waving goodbye. After selecting the choicest of weapons from the Pelican's stockpile, along with armour abilities, Marcus, Juliette, Edward, and Raj buckled up in the back and Arianna sat herself down in the pilot's seat. The coordinates on the screen led the way as SPARTAN Pearlman carefully navigated the dropship through Requiem's gravity well and to the ruin. She hovered a metre off the ground to let everyone else jump out.

What was left of the proud city was made entirely out of stone, so Reynolds suspected that it had been built a ruin. Green covered everything. Built in a clearing in dense rainforest, the broken city was layered with plant life reclaiming the compact buildings. Moss grew in every nook and cranny, and rainwater pooled in the dips in the cobblestone streets. A tiered ziggurat rose in the center of the city, towering over all of the broken walls and collapsed roofs. Motioning to the pyramid, Kahn said, "There's as good a place as any to start, and if we don't find anything, Quin will have a sniper's nest." Reynolds quickly signed this to Quin, who nodded once, a clear confirmation that the plan was an acceptable one.

Brady pulled a knife out of her ankle sheath and snuck to the edge of the ruins, peering out at the rest of the city. She held out three fingers in a sideways fashion, signifying the all-clear. Reynolds hefted his shotgun and went left, watching as his radar showed the rest of Fireteam Nebula fanning out. When Brady's dot disappeared, Reynolds knew it was go time. He steeped out of his corner and advanced warily toward the city centre.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>AN: I don't want to sit here and beg, but I do want reviews to tell me how to improve and what to keep and what to add more of and what to remove. Reviews help make me a better writer, so please critique me.\*\*

## 6. And Palmer Said, Let There Be Sight

\*\*A/N: Hello all! Palmer is hard to write. Forgive me if she isn't accurate. And if you don't, write Palmer and prove me wrong.\*\*

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\* \* \*

><p>And Palmer Said, Let There Be Sight<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Kahn flanked left, battle rifle pointing. There was nothing. Carefully, he activated the Promethean Vision he had snagged back aboard the Pelican. He looked left and right, scanning for enemies behind walls. All he saw was the green outline of his team. SPARTAN Quin was being escorted by Reynolds, Brady was just a light blue outline, barely visible even with his armour ability, and Pearlman was almost indubitably away in the clouds, flying the bird.<p>

Kahn whispered over his comm, "It's quiet . . . Too quiet. My Promethean Vision isn't picking anything up."

Pearlman was the one to respond. "Sensors don't show anything, but that doesn't mean there isn't anything there. The Covenant spoofed my bird over Reach in 2552. I was just lucky to escape, even though I was forced to watch another glassing . . ." Her voice trailed off.

Reynolds picked up the conversation. "But I thought the Storm was here to meet with one of their gods. Why would they tamper with his Promethean's equipment?"

Brady answered. "Don't forget that the Master Chief killed the Didact. Maybe the Storm has figured this out and has decided he isn't a god. The rest of the Covenant figured that out and are relatively peaceful. Heck, I visited Sanghelios to guard a diplomat. There was a statue of the Master Chief. A plaque identified it as A Monument For All Out Sins. Something about not being blinded by lies, lest a demon rise out of the ashes of a world they burned to take revenge."

Kahn opened his mouth to reply when his Promethean Vision flared a bright red in the approximate shape of a man. "Contact! Right in front of us!" He jumped out of hiding and brought his battle rifle to bear. He recognised the creature only as an unrecognised enemy. Squeezing off a trio of bullets aimed at the creature's head, Kahn blinked in surprise when light blue light just stopped the bullets without any of the crackling he had come to associate with energy shielding. The thing raised a squat, metal weapon glowing with a reddish light rather like on the joints of whatever armour the enemy was wearing.

Kahn ducked behind the wall and said, "What the hell was that!?"

He heard Stephenson's voice as the creature rounded the corner. "That's a Promethean-," The creature . . . Promethean . . . started firing little yellow bullets in a wide spray, "-Knight, an Artificial-," so SPARTAN Kahn leaned his weight onto his left ankle and rolled underneath the spread pattern. "- Intelligence created from an ancient-" Kahn popped up and shot several times, the blue shielding glowing brighter with each successive hit, "-human. They have guns-" before he ran out of ammunition. He began reloading and felt his shields drop alarmingly quickly. "-that shoot hard light. They-" Looking up, Kahn saw the yellow hard light bullets pinging against his shield and rolled, shooting his reloaded Battle Rifle as he went. "-can also teleport, so-" The Knight's blue shield broke and it quickly adopted a pose resembling a praying man. Knees slightly bent and arms folded up. "-kill them before they flee." Khan held the gun steady as he squeezed the trigger, but the figure was gone by the time the bullets reached where it had been. Activating Promethean Vision, Kahn located where the Knight had teleported to and, hoping to catch the Promethean by surprise, vaulted over the wall, burying six armour piercing rounds into the Knight, whose shields were still down. The Promethean dissolved into flakes of hard light, leaving behind its gun and a pair of spiky orbs.

He warily walked over and investigated the spoils of war. The orbs had a priming mechanism and were clearly meant to be thrown. A grenade of some sort, then. Kahn picked the grenades up and attached them to the hip-clip of his red armour when Stephenson came on the radio. "Those are pulse grenades, and that gun is called a suppressor. I'll have Roland run a patch through all the armours so that they will recognise Forerunner tech."

SPARTAN Kahn bent down and picked up the gun, which disassembled itself and changed slightly, becoming a little easier to hold. Kahn had no idea how the weapon did that, but he appreciated it all the

same. He continued around the corner, barely aware of his allies.

Suddenly, he heard a small scream of surprise before Brady clarified. Her breathing was jagged, as though she was actively dodging and rolling. "Sorry if I burst someone's eardrums, but a pack of robot dogs just materialised right in front of me. They don't seem to be the Promethean Knight that Stephenson just told us about. No shields, and I can crush them underfoot."

"Yeah, sorry, Nebula. Didn't expect you to meet Prometheans on your first drop, but I suppose an incredibly important piece of Forerunner surveillance tech would be guarded by Forerunners. These guys are crawlers. Grunts that can climb on walls, basically. All you need is to go 'Boom! Headshot!' to kill 'em." Palmer. "Oh, and watch out for Watchers. They fly around, have shields, can cast shields on others, and a lot of other real nasty stuff like revive dead Knights."

Brady announced, "Got 'em all. Not that bad, but the nasties are damn fast. Let's all meet up and have Pearlman right over our head as we get to the ziggurat." Kahn blinked his green, and a moment later, so did four others. Activating Promethean Vision, Kahn located Brady and wove around walls, jumping over fallen columns to get to her. When his Vision flickered out, it said he was right next to a prone Brady, but if he didn't have his armour ability, Kahn would never have seen Brady. It wasn't her armour ability. She was just naturally sneaky.

She took off her Active Camo and stood up from her army crawl. A minute later, Quin and Reynolds came from the other direction and the hum of a Pelican appeared overhead. The next few minutes became a blur as the Prometheans appeared and died, only to come back with another fighting force.

Kahn was almost out of bullets for his battle rifle and knew he was in trouble when a Knight with explosive ordnance teleported not four metres in front of him. Whipping out his suppressor, he pulled the trigger, but the beast hardly flinched. With machine-like precision, it held up the incineration cannon attached to its arm and began to level it at SPARTAN Kahn.

Kahn didn't think, just rolled to avoid . . . nothing? He quickly activated Promethean Vision and saw a green outline carrying a knife near where the Knight had been. He blinked his green light at Brady and swapped his battle rifle for the incineration cannon.

Scaling a broken column, he saw for the first time just how thick the fighting was. Perfect. Kahn whispered, "I want everyone to extricate themselves from the battle. I found some high explosives."

He watched as the shadow of a shadow quietly snuck off the battlefield and saw blue and black armour facing back to back, each with a shotgun as they pumped rounds into alien A.I., Quin's sniper rifle slung over his back. The pair slowly walked out of the mess. Reynolds must have gotten the message across to Quin. The steady RAT-A-TAT-TAT of Pearlman's gun ceased as she said, "I thought you were Explosive Ordnance Disposal."

"I am. And I am disposing of this explosive ordnance. By using

it." Kahn launched a ruddy, glowing globule of light. It splashed into the sea of Prometheans, immolating several. Kahn fingered a grenade, primed it, and threw it into the mass of enemy's hoping to group them together for another shot from the cannon. So Kahn blinked when a Watcher caught\_it and threw the pulse grenade back at Kahn. He dove off of his perch on the pillar and fired another sphere of hard light into the mob.

Kahn rolled when he hit, and although his MJOLNIR armour absorbed most of the impact, Kahn's shoulder still burned. When he looked up, the top of the broken pillar he had been standing on was reduced to ash, but so was a sizable portion of the enemy. Kahn's HUD informed him that he had one last shot in the Incineration Cannon. Kahn didn't want to waste it, so he blew away one of the Knights with the fancy headdresses before tossing the gun down and picking up the recently deceased Knight's scattershot, claiming it for his own.

The SPARTANs were pressing forward when Pearlman came onto the radio. "Warning! Picking up multiple high energy signatures in the air. I'm pulling out." Kahn grimaced and settled down with the others at his back, digging in for the long fight. Looking up, he saw a blue circle issue out of nothing and watched as hundreds of Watchers issued out. They spread out, casting beams of light over certain areas. Kahn had no idea what they were doing, and they were too far away to kill with the weapons he had; Quin was pegging Watcher after Watcher with his sniper rifle.

The beams of light solidified themselves into packs of crawlers, and . . . eyes? At least, that's what they looked like. Until one of them shot a beam of hard light at the SPARTANs. They scattered, and Kahn found himself back to back with Reynolds. He too hefted the scattershot he'd grabbed. Kahn looked over at Brady guarding Quin as he pegged Watchers and the laser tower things. "Ready?"

Kahn barely processed this as he swung his own weapon to the enemy. "Ready." The two began a deadly dance, shooting and trusting the other would protect their back.

When the first Knight warped in, Reynolds shot it full in the chest and called out, "How do these weapons work, anyhow?"

Kahn pointed and shot. "Well, I can't be sure but-" BANG. "-Science says it uses hard-" Kahn sprayed his Suppressor at a charging Crawler. "-light, so I imagine it uses the-" By now, Kahn was shouting to be heard over the cacophony of bullets, hard light, and the rare explosion as Brady did her work and Quin blew away Knights with headshots. "-same concept as some of the shelved experiments-" Both rolled right to dodge an explosion from one of the Knights with yellow tattoos made out of hard light. The Promethean jumped in between the pair. Both shot once. Twice. The creature dissolved. Kahn backed up to Reynolds, pumping a round of hard light into a Watcher before it could reanimate its fallen comrade. Back to back with Reynolds, the pair began to advance toward the ziggurat and Kahn continued his explanation. "-experiments about getting temperatures below absolute zero."

"What? Isn't that impossible? And how does that relate to hard light?"

"Well,-" BANG. "-the experiments use quantum gases, like

superchilled sodium ions, and once past absolute zero, the properties wrap around infinity, kind of like - Watch out!" The pair dodged a Knight and Kahn took its arm right off and expertly drove the attached blade into the main body, which vaporised. "-like when you divide by zero. What's really neat is when something that cold is hit by light, the photons actually transfer enough of their energy-" A small army of Crawlers interrupted the rhythm of battle by jumping at Reynolds. He started punching the sly beasts into submission, and a moment later, he ripped the head off of the one with spines and picked his scattershot up from where he had discarded it.

Kahn bent his knees into a ready position as Reynolds came back from where the Prometheans had corralled him. "When the photons hit a quantum gas, they spend enough energy trying to heat the atoms up to a 'real' temperature that they slow down or even stop. Chances are, the Forerunners used this concept." More shots and another incineration cannon later, the group arrived at the base of the ziggurat.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>AN: I think this is actually true and has happened, but if someone who knows more about quantum physics reads this, please tell me if I am wrong about my explanation. Thanks!\*

\* \* \*

><p>Pearlman came onto the comm. "Get into the pyramid and I'll help Quin defend the base. One handsign from Reynolds was all it took for four SPARTANs to charge up the ziggurat as one descended from the low-hanging clouds. At the top, three SPARTANs began the walk into the bowels of the ziggurat. Quin laid himself down on the four square metre flat top that surrounded the stairs leading to the crypt in the centre. Pearlman flew around, providing air support.<p>

The path down was quiet. No traps, no tricks, no enemies. What there was was a metal post that stood out from the stone blocks that made up the ruin. It gleamed as though polished daily, and was completely free of foliage. Fourteen rings floated about the pole, and a hard light panel rested on top. Kahn hit the switch. It reminded him of his first job. He'd been seventeen and training to be a surgeon. The number of dead in the war was astonishing, and he had wanted to help. All it had taken was pushing the wrong button on the drug panel. He should have double checked. The patient was allergic to what was supposed to be a mild anesthetic. His application for a Medicine Licence had been revoked. His father's words to him right after his arm had been crushed proved to be his last, but they had haunted Raj ever since. "You are no son of mine. I will not have someone who cannot even administer mild anesthetics trying to keep me from dying of something far more serious." Those words had been said through teeth gritted against pain, but Raj had caught the undercurrent of anger seeping through.

So he was understandably relieved when Palmer came on. "Good work, Nebula. Not as fast as Opalescent, but barely slower. Roland says we have eyes. And a target. Head to your bird, Stephenson will brief you on the way."

The three SPARTANs charged up the stairs to a wonderful sight. Pearlman had brought her Pelican's cargo bay to the edge of the

pyramid, and Quin sat on one of the seats, gun pointed in the distance. It bucked. Following the bullet, Kahn saw a group of Prometheans coming to intercept the departing Fireteam Nebula. The remaining SPARTANs stormed the Pelican. Once all were aboard, the Pelican lifted off. It oriented itself as Arianna's fingers danced across the console before jetting off toward whatever coordinates Roland had beamed to it.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>AN: Now that I have written everyone, chapters will get longer (hopefully), so I will take longer (on average) to update.\*\*

## 7. And There Was, And She Saw Dead Covenant

\*\*A/N: Until I get a few more yeas or some nays, I will wait on continuing Drifting By and By. That means Nebula is back in action. Enjoy!\*\*

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\* \* \*

><p>And There Was, And She Saw Dead Covenant<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Juliette sat in the back of the Pelican, doing nothing. She started when Arianna shouted, "ETA: 1 minute. Buckle up back there, because this ride is going to get bumm-py!"<p>

True to her word, Pearlman made the Pelican buck up and down to dodge the plasma fire that began to fly past the transperisteel windows. "It's getting too hot around here! No way I'll be able to provide air support. We'll settle down a little ways back and then troop out here on foot." With that, Pearlman spun the Pelican in an incredibly tight circle and hauled her proverbial metal ass of a Pelican out of the plasma fire.

Brady felt the engines switch, and could tell that Pearlman had begun the descent. Once the Pelican touched, five SPARTANs piled out, pulling out their favorite weapons. The group began the walk to the Covenant encampment that Roland had found using the surveillance equipment that Nebula had turned on. Brady asked, "So, Pearlman, we have 'Demon Armour'. Why not just let us jump out the back and take out the anti-air guns?"

"Because I wanted to join you. We'll just need to hike back to my bird once they're out."

"I'll come with to guard you, just in case."

"Do you not trust me to come back and pick you up?"

Brady let out a small, "Maybe," and Kahn started chuckling. A few more steps and the Pelican disappeared behind the foliage of the

temperate forest that surrounded the Covenant base. From the few glances she had gotten, it was of Forerunner construction, with brilliant gleaming metal, glowing pulses of hard light, and sweeping, dramatic angles. Brady pressed on, a little ways ahead of the other SPARTANs.

The trees became more sparsely spread and the blanket of leaves on the ground began to thin. Five sets of armour slowed to a walk as they got closer and closer to the Covenant base. The leader in pastel green and yellow Venator armour held up her right fist. Red E.O.D., purple Air Assault, black Gungnir, and ice-blue Deadeye armour all came to a halt.

"What is it?" Reynolds whispered.

"I thought I saw something, a flicker of movement on the edge of my vision."

"Could it have been a bird?" Kahn asked. "My motion tracker hasn't picked anything up."

Brady was quick to respond. "I don't think so." At another hand sign, everyone formed up, adopting a V-formation with Brady at the front flanked by Kahn and Reynolds on her left and right, respectively. Pearlman and Quin trailed behind.

The group snuck forward quietly until Kahn whispered, "I see something." His fatal mistake came when he pointed at the patch of wavering air with his gloved hand.

The Elite roared as it uncloaked itself. Drawing its energy sword, the Elite charged at the group. It was too close for Quin's sniper rifle, Brady's body was in the way of Pearlman and Kahn's fire, the shotgun Reynolds had settled for was ineffective at such 'long' ranges, and the personal defence MD6 magnum Brady used was nowhere near strong enough to kill the Zealot before it got to her. \_Well, shit.\_

Brady pulled out her combat knife and charged the charging elite. The energy sword was stronger and had a longer range than Brady's combat knife, but both Brady and her knife were faster than the Elite. Even as it swung, Brady dodged backward and then rolled underneath the swing, ending up inside the Elite's reach. Before it could take its own weapon back and stab her, Brady plunged her knife deep into the Zealot's chest, through the energy shielding and through the armour. Once in, Brady twisted the blade for good measure.

She kicked the Elite off of her chest, wiping the blade off to avoid rust. Brady picked up its energy sword and walked over to the assembled SPARTANs. "How much you wanna bet that that was a scouting party that we just crashed?"

Unsurprisingly, it was Kahn who answered. "Nah. Five credits says it was a wedding, and you just killed the groom."

\* \* \*

><p><strong>AN: Credits. Money of the future, today!\*

\* \* \*



><p>As the voice of reason, Pearlman said, "It's likely that the Elite got a message back to base. You have invisibility, and Quin can scavenge Active Camo off of the Elite you killed. Why don't the two of you run infiltration, check out the scene?"<p>

Reynolds was quick to point out, "But Brady doesn't know sign language."

Pearlman brushed him off with a flick of her hand. "You explain. He is quiet, doesn't talk much. Unlike this joker." She casually used the middle finger of her other hand to gesture to the red E.O.D. armour worn by Kahn.

Brady could tell that if they weren't knee deep in the enemy's neck of the woods, just a few trees away from the Covenant base, Kahn would have taken quite a bit of offence at that. Indeed, it appeared as though he was visibly trying to restrain himself from shouting out. Pearlman ignored Kahn's restraint and secured her victory with, "Don't forget that his Deadeye armour auto-zooms on things of interest."

Once Pearlman had hammered the last nail into the coffin, Reynolds made a rapid series of hand signs to Quin, who responded in kind and nodded to the others. He jogged over to the dead Elite and bent down, rummaging. A moment later, he stood up and Brady joined him. The two flickered before their forms wavered into nothingness.

The two invisible SPARTANS crept into the structure. They were on some sort of balcony, a second storey that wrapped around the wall. For a Forerunner structure, it was quite small, only a couple thousand cubic metres. The pair crept to the edge of the railing and peered down.

A small army of Covenant greeted them. A pair of Hunters, several Elites, a whole pack of Jackals. All were islands on the sea of Grunts, which pressed up against the walls and even a door recessed in the background. Stephenson came on with a whispered, "Those doors there-" A blue diamond marked both HUDs. "-are where the shield generators keeping us from bombing this place are."

"You have got to be kidding me."

"I'm not, unfortunately. Fortunately, here, here, here, here, and here are the anti-air guns." Each here was punctuated by the appearance of a red diamond in the general vicinity of the base. "Take those down so that you can fly over and drop behind the base. The back door is much less heavily guarded."

A quick motion to Quin was all it took to get the pair out of the area before their Active Camo ran out. Standing up once outside the base, Brady asked a question. "Good news or bad news first?"

Pearlman was quick to answer. "My father always told me to get the bad news first so that I could anticipate the good rather than worry about the bad."

"Bad news: There are five Covenant anti-air encampments keeping your Pelican down, Pearlman, and an entire armada, it looks like, is

guarding the shield generator keeping Lasky from bombing this place to hell." Brady paused for a moment, giving ample time for the others to let loose carefully crafted strings of profanity. She interrupted Kahn during a particularly inventive and descriptive curse. "The good news now. If we disable the guns, Pearlman can fly us over the base and set us down around the back, which has fewer troops."

"How many fewer?"

"I don't know. Let's find out."

Quin, who had been following the conversation by watching Reynolds's constant updates suddenly made a series of hand signs, which Reynolds then interpreted. "Quin says, 'There are five gun placements and five of us SPARTANS. Why don't we each take one?' Personally, I like the plan."

Kahn, Brady, and Pearlman responded with, "Sounds good to me," almost in sync. A few moments discussion was all it took before the group scattered. Quin turned around and disappeared into the trees on the hill overlooking the first gun. As Brady turned to watch Kahn and Reynolds lope off in the direction of the furthest guns, she saw Quin scaling a tree, sniper rifle slung across his back.

Brady grinned and dashed toward her gun while Pearlman tried desperately to keep up. Brady glanced back just in time to see Pearlman's Sunspot visor disappear behind some trees as she headed toward her gun. Brady kept on in the direction her HUD showed for a minute more.

When she was thirty metres away from the location on her HUD, Brady registered a clearing and slowed to a stop behind a tree. Peering around it, she spotted the anti-aircraft gun. Really, it would be hard to miss. A reddish-purple, almost maroon, the gun was huge. Probably twenty metres tall, it towered above the trees, a long barrel with fishhook-like appendages running off the sides. The barrel was attached to a plasma core hooked into the ground by a metal pole that would be hard to break. Three graceful legs held the barrel directly above the plasma so that the superheated lighter-than-air gases could float up to the gun naturally.

First thing first. Brady crept out from behind her tree and activated her Active Camo. Her svelte form dissolved, dust thrown to the wind. If the Grunts guarding the gun had been looking, they probably wouldn't have seen her anyway. The Grunts fell one by one as she snapped necks, ripped off masks, and stabbed a few, coating her invisible knife with fluorescent blue blood. The last few began to run around. Sadly, their paroxysms attracted a nearby Elite and his squad of Jackals.

The Elite roared a challenge, and Brady came to answer it. Drawing her energy sword, she ran at the Elite, who began to fill the air around her with superhot plasma, boiling spheres of energy that would have burnt her alive if not for her MJOLNIR armour. Brady swung her own plasma blade right through the Elite's energy shielding, armour, flesh, muscle, and bone, killing it in one blow.

A beeping HUD reminded Brady that several Jackals were firing at her. Rolling behind a tree, SPARTAN Brady waited for her shields to recharge. Once they had, she dashed from behind cover and drove her

combat knife into the lead Jackal with the orange energy shield. Prying the gauntlet off, Brady advanced on the other Jackals, punching or stabbing them to death. As she approached the last pair of Grunts, who had picked themselves up and were now eating away at her nice shield, a beep and a green light informed Brady that Quin had shut down his gun. Of course, he also had the closest gun. And a sniper rifle.

Not to be outdone, Brady abandoned the Point-Defence gauntlet and trusted to her own shielding as she dashed at the Grunts. The pair stood right next to each other, so she bashed their heads together before running back to the middle of the clearing. Brady had no idea how Quin had destroyed his anti-aircraft gun, so she pulled out her energy sword and cut the pipe into two pieces. Plasma began to leak out of the generator, so Brady ran. Without magnetic fields to shape and stabilise the plasma, it began to cool down as fast as possible, and in as violent a way as possible. An explosion shook the clearing just after Brady got clear.

As Brady walked back to the Pelican, she noticed that Reynolds had activated his green. Damn him. Brady quickly turned hers on. By the time she got to the Pelican, all five greens were showing. Quin had beat her, of course, but by sprinting back, she arrived at the same time as Reynolds, whose encampment had been slightly closer. Kahn emerged from the foliage carrying the plasma generator cradled in his arms. "Anyone order bomb up-side down soufflÃ©?"

\* \* \*

><p><strong>AN: Fun fact: SoufflÃ© means 'blown' in French, hence his question.\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>Pearlman burst through the leaves in time to catch the tail end of his statement. "Why in <em>hell</em> did you take the unstable plasma generator out of its stabiliser rather than just blow it all up?"

As everyone clambered aboard the Pelican, Kahn answered smoothly. "I broke the shell of the stabiliser-pumper and actually fixed the stabiliser to the core, see." He made a gesture to a metal fixture attached to the plasma core. "Therefore, it won't blow up until I take that off. We'll have about eighteen seconds to get clear."

The Pelican lifted off and Reynolds yelled to be heard over the thrusters. "So you want us to affix it to the-"

He was cut off by Kahn, who was clearly excited about his plan. "To the shield generator and blow it all to hell!"

"If that works and you actually save us a ton of bullets, then you are a genius. If it blows us up, then you are the stupidest git ever . . . of all time," Pearlman bellowed from the cockpit.

Kahn's rebreathers bobbed up and down with his helmet as he shouted out, "Apology accepted!" Pearlman just groaned.

She flew steadily above the bunker now that the air around it was free of plasma fire. After setting down behind the Forerunner

structure, five SPARTANs stepped out of the Pelican. Brady grinned under her helmet as the group approached the small back door. "Knock, knock."

The door slid open with a \_whoosh\_. An Elite turned from its duty at a console at the sound. It roared, attracting the attention of the entire room. Seven more Elites, thirty-eight Grunts, and twenty-three Jackals turned at the sound. One of them rushed at the opposite door to call for reinforcements, but Pearlman put several rounds of her DMR into both the Grunt and the door panel. It flickered out, keeping the door permanently closed. Meanwhile, the other Covenant massed in the room did the logical thing. They charged. Five against sixty-eight. An easy win. Right?

Brady didn't think. She pulled out her energy sword and combat knife. She lost track of her team. She felt the waves of fire called adrenalin burning away at her flesh, her skin, even her armour. They thought she was a demon. A demon she became. The outer coverings peeled off, leaving only the burned red skin, and the horns, and the tail. Brilliant eyes, glowing green, were all that remained. Oh, and a pile of dead Covenant.

Brady snapped back to herself when Kahn said, "Back up. I've found the shield generator and am setting our bomb." He made a swift movement with his hand and shouted, "Run!" at the top of his lungs.

Five sets of pounding feet, eighteen seconds, and one explosion later, SPARTAN Stephenson came on. "That was lovely. A few more cataclysmic explosions like that, and you'll be real SPARTANs. Starting orbital bombardment in just a minute. Covenant won't be able to use this base again after that.

"Get clear of the bombs in your Pelican and get back to the \_Infinity\_. Fireteam Crimson has found something, and Palmer wants all hands on deck if it decides to attack."

Five green lights winked, and a lone Pelican lifted off. A moment later, it was silhouetted by twin suns. One was the output of a fusion generator on the inside of a Forerunner Dyson Shell masquerading as a star. The other was a giant explosion.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>AN: Crimson is really fast. Palmer has said it a couple of times. That is why we are already to the artifact.\*\*

\*\*Oh, and review to tell me what I'm doing wrong (so I can stop doing it) and what I'm doing right (so I can keep doing it) in the reviews. I want you to help me improve my writing, and I am not afraid of criticism. Thanks!\*\*

## 8. The Artifact

\*\*A/N: Only twenty or so people are reading this, but I do feel that abandoning it would be cruel, unless someone else wanted to pick it up. This chapter is just a short segue. I don't think that there are any explosions at all. The reason that it took so long is because I was on vacation and then got stuck because I was busy writing a

separate story (Upon a Midnight Dreary). Please enjoy, you twenty readers!\*\*

\*\*Oh, has anyone seen Bungie's new game (Destiny)? Please tell me that I am not the only one who noticed that they have a - and I quote - 'evil space zombie' enemy that sounds suspiciously like the Flood. Or am I just hoping? Yes, I like the Flood as an enemy. Deal with it.\*\*

\*\*Happy Saint Patrick's Day! Or else.\*\*

\*\*Disclaimer: I am in no way affiliated with Microsoft, Bungie, or 343 Industries. This is for my enjoyment and, hopefully, the enjoyment of others. I do not receive a profit.\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>The Artifact<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Marcus was anxious to get back to the UNSC <em>Infinity<em>. He wanted to talk to Cara, but that would be difficult if everyone pulled guard duty for whatever Crimson had found.

He looked at the others sitting in the Pelican. Juliette and Raj were breaking regs by taking their helmets off for a space flight, while Edward, like himself, was helmeted. Marcus could only guess as to how Arianna treated helmet regulations, but he hoped she could fly whether she wore one or not.

Marcus sat back and sighed, feeling every bump from turbulence as the Pelican gained altitude and tried desperately to escape Requiem's gravity well. With a final effort, Arianna pulled the Pelican free and into space. She flew steadily towards Infinity and angled her bird toward one of the space docks. Nebula's Pelican slowed to a stop and hovered just outside the magnetic field preventing decompression of the hangar bay. Arianna eased the Pelican in and over one of the landing pads. She carefully lowered thruster power until Marcus felt a slight jolt as the Pelican made contact with the pad. The hum of the engines died and the Pelican's bay door opened.

Each SPARTAN took off his or her helmet (or left it off if they were breaking regulations) and stepped out of the Pelican. Stephenson greeted the members of Fireteam Nebula as they stepped off of the ship. "Hello, Nebula. Lasky and Palmer have no clue what Crimson's artifact will do, so they want all hands on deck."

Marcus half-listened, forming his hands into the signs for Edward. /Lasky and Palmer want us to be ready because they don't know what the artifact that Crimson found will do.\

Therefore, he almost missed Arianna's query. "Which deck do all hands need to be on?"

Stephenson replied with a simple, "This one. Hangar 23. Last door on the left." Marcus signed exactly that to Edward. Everyone put on helmets and then the five SPARTANs strode out of the hangar, demons in full battle regalia.

Marcus found himself on the crest of a wave in a charging sea of armour. Bringing his hand up, fingers curled, Marcus signaled the others to stop, lest they be swept away by the tide of SPARTANS heading towards Crimson's find. Juliette began, "Why are we - oh." Marcus saw everyone else peeking around him to see what Juliette had reacted to. Even Edward could tell that something big was happening as he stood on tiptoes to see over Juliette's tall figure.

There was tall, as in two metres, and then there was really tall, as in two-and-half metres. SPARTANS were all tall, but Juliette was really tall. Edward was somewhere in between, leaning towards really tall, while Arianna and Raj were almost the same height, each about two metres tall. Marcus was between Edward and Arianna (who was slightly taller than Raj) at two hundred twenty-four centimetres.

Juliette used her height to scan the crowd as Nebula stood around the doorway. When an opening presented itself, she led the way as Fireteam Nebula pushed into the crowd. The purple and white, black on black, red with red, turquoise wrapping ice, and sea-foam green next to pastel yellow waded into the sea of coloured armour.

Raj led the way, walking swiftly toward hangar twenty-three. Suddenly, a motion caught Marcus's eye. It was like orange lightning spreading along the sides of the bulkhead separating the hall from the rest of the ship. And it was traveling fast. It had originated from the far end of the hall, where no SPARTANS were, and already, the racing light had passed the first of the SPARTANS, who stopped to see just what was going on.

Marcus half-expected the light to hurt, but it just blew by him as he turned to watch it, his original goal of getting to the origin of the wierd orange lightning nearly forgotten. By the way the other SPARTANS had stopped, Marcus was pretty sure that they wanted to know about the orange light too.

A shoulder bumped Marcus's and a female voice whispered in his ear, "Come on. Lets see where the light came from, not where it goes." Marcus looked right and saw a figure in deep blue Oceanic armour standing next to him.

"What?"

"Let's go to hangar 23, rather than stand here like a bunch of robots."

"But protocol dictates - woah!" Marcus began rising off the ground at a slight angle.

Cara replied as though she had heard his whole sentence even though she too began to float. "Oh, come on. You're a cyborg, not a robot, no matter what the conspiracy theorists believe. It'll be fun. Like swimming." To demonstrate, Cara grabbed one of the many metal bars running parallel to the ceiling, just a bit below it and pulled herself up to it. She then pushed off the ceiling, over the heads of the other floating SPARTANS, toward hangar 23.

Although he shook his head, a wolfish grin crossed Marcus's face. He had no clue how she did it, but Cara had always roped him into the most stupid adventures. Maybe it was because they had always had so

much fun doing stupid things. Marcus pushed off of the wall he had drifted near, aiming to overtake Cara.

Looking back, Marcus saw Raj leap after him, determined to find out why Marcus was having fun breaking regulations. Raj was doing a modified breaststroke through the air, and although it looked stupid, air did have some friction. Marcus could feel himself slowing down; Raj was, if anything, going faster.

Looking ahead, Marcus saw Cara crash onto the deck and then felt his own body plummeting towards the floor. As he spun, trying to land on his feet, Marcus saw Raj trying desperately to flap his arms like a bird. Suffice to say that it didn't work. With her head start, Cara was not near any SPARTANs when she fell, and Marcus was near the front, where there were fewer SPARTANs, so he didn't hit anyone. Raj landed with a solid thump - right on top of Juliette.

Marcus got up with a groan and pushed through the thoroughly confused SPARTANs back to the rest of Nebula so that he could make sure Juliette was okay. When he arrived, Raj was off of Juliette and apologising profusely while Edward was . . . laughing? Who knew that quiet, shy Edward Quin found slapstick funny?

When Marcus saw the glint of Arianna's Sunspot visor, she said, "Oh, good. You're here. Did you find the source of the magic light?"

"No."

"Then why didn't you invite me to come flying with you?"

"Because it was a spur of the moment thing. A very spur of the moment thing."

Raj, who had stopped apologising to Juliette, asked, "Spur of the moment? Or just didn't want us to interfere with your girlfriend?"

Marcus blushed underneath his helmet before he replied. "She is not my girlfriend."

Raj shrugged and said, "Edward says that you were going to meet in the ventilation shafts on C-deck. If it wasn't to suck face, why would you meet her in such a secluded area? To let her suck on something else of yours, maybe?"

Juliette turned to look at him, clearly dumbfounded despite her Venator armour. Arianna, on the other hand, took a much more direct route. "That's private!" she hissed before slapping his red E.O.D. helmet right on the rebreather.

Marcus doubted that it would actually hurt Raj, so he went ahead and signed Edward a question. /Why did you tell Kahn that I was going to meet with Cara?\

Edward appeared to shake in his Deadeye armour for a moment before responding. /I didn't see any harm in it, and you didn't ask me to keep it a secret. Plus, it will blow up into something really funny.\

Marcus just groaned. He had liked quiet Edward.

Raj poked Marcus and asked in the most annoying way possible, "So if she isn't your girlfriend, can she be mine?" Marcus knew that it was a joke from the way that Raj ran his hand over his helmet as though slicking his hair back, but Marcus still thought it odd.

A moment later, Raj asked, "But in all seriousness, who is the girl?"

"The 'girl' is Cara Niven, a friend of mine from primary school."

Raj interrupted him to ask, "You call her Cara but me Kahn. Why is that?"

Marcus replied. "First names are for friends, last names for everyone else." Raj looked miffed despite his helmet. "In any case, Cara was deaf, but can hear now, apparently. We were going to meet in a secluded area to catch up when we were told to report to hangar 23.

Speaking of which, we should probably get there to see what the matter is." Raj looked up to see the other SPARTANS walking cautiously toward hangar 23.

Suddenly, Palmer burst out of the door at the far end of the hall. Captain Lasky followed closely behind her and bellowed, "SPARTANS! Doctor Glassman has been taken by Crimson's artifact. We have decided that hangar 23 is off-limits to all SPARTANS that do not need that area as their express come-and-go zone."

Palmer then took over. "In other words, if you aren't Fireteams Crimson or Majestic, don't come in. Do you need an 'Out of Order' sign?"

A loud voice called out, "No!"

Palmer continued. "That was a rhetorical question, SPARTAN Whitshire. I want each fireteam back to their own hangars so that we can start a search grid. Fireteams Opalescent and Nebula were kind enough to turn on some security cameras, so we know of a few possible locations. Your handlers will debrief you."

Marcus made his way back to hangar 10 a bit depressed that his conversation with Cara would have to wait. He trailed behind a bit, hoping that she would come up behind him. But she never did.

Once Nebula was gathered around Stephenson, he took his helmet off and addressed everyone. "Palmer was proud of your individuality and ability to get things done the way you wanted to, especially considering the fact that you are new SPARTANS. As such, she has decided to send you to infiltrate an underwater base that Opalescent's cameras detected. The water interferes with our long-range sensors and broadcasting, and Lasky believes that the Storm Covenant know this. As such, it is possible that they have taken Glassman there. Because we cannot transmit to or receive data from that area, you will go in without any recon and then be flying dark. Oh, and Pearlman, we need all of Fireteam Nebula down under. You are all doing a hard drop into the ocean near where the base is.



You won't have a Pelican.

Your armour has two hours of air. That should be plenty. Once you get into the base, which does have air, look for Glassman and kill anything in your way. If you find him, blow the base and get topside as fast as possible. If you don't, well, we don't want the Covvies knowing that we know about the base, so kill everything and then swim up."

Stephenson handed Juliette a small metal disk. "This is your beacon. Once you get to the surface, hit the button on top and a Pelican will pick you up."

Walking over to the wall, Stephenson said, "SOEIV pods are here in this corner of the hangar." Everyone climbed into an HEV and Stephenson closed each door, saying, "Good luck," to each SPARTAN as he closed his or her pod. Stephenson walked over to a panel in the wall and hit a button.

Marcus felt his pod plummet and felt the tug of the artificial gravity get less and less. Four video screens popped open in his helmet, showing the inside of four separate helmets. The first screen had a video of a pale woman with violet eyes, platinum hair, and a slight pout at not being in control of her flight path. The next video was of a dark-skinned man with brown hair, brown eyes and a joyful expression. Raj was just enjoying the ride. On the next screen, Edward looked like he was a million miles away, his amber eyes glazed over. How he could ignore the multitude of bumps as the SOEIV pods used micro-thrusters to readjust themselves, Marcus just didn't know. On the last screen, Juliette's red hair framed her green eyes, which were filled with worry. Marcus guessed she had heard the stories about ODSs that had him similarly worried, considering his firsthand experience. Burnt up pods, crazy landing angles, failed chutes, and even plain, simple failure to find a missing ODS when a pod micro-adjusted the wrong way.

In his own time as an ODS, Marcus had never had that happen to him, but he did know that the stories tended to be more fact than rumour. He was always a bit cautious of jumping, even though he'd successfully done it eight times before this. Marcus had certainly earned the "badass" tattoo on his shoulder, but that didn't stop his trepidation.

On that happy note, Marcus rode his pod into the briny deep.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>AN: Am I characterising everyone well? It sort of feels like they are all bleeding into one another. Oh, and tell me if I have any mistakes. Thank you.\*\*

## 9. Das Boot

\*\*A/N: I was writing this and doing research for the story (I want accurate writing), and I found out that Requiem is probably a Dyson \*\*\*\*\_Shell\_\*\*\*\*, not a Dyson \*\*\*\*\_Sphere.\_\*\*\*\* I have had chapter 7 (And There Was, And She Saw Dead Covenant), where I stated that Requiem was a Forerunner Dyson Sphere, up for quite some time, and no one has corrected me. I have fixed that now, but I do want people

correcting me if ever I blunder or err. I know that not everyone is into theoretical physics, but I do think that there are definitely some people who could list off the pros, cons, and description of a Dyson Net, a Dyson Bubble, a Dyson Shield, a Dyson Sphere, a Dyson Shell, a Dyson Swarm, a Niven Ring, and a Matrioshka Brain, just in terms of Type-II Kardashev civilisations. Said person would then yell at me for not going in-depth as to how the Forerunners would overcome the engineering difficulties of creating a Dyson Shell. Rant over. Enjoy.\*\*

\*\*Disclaimer: I am in no way affiliated with Microsoft, Bungie, or 343 Industries. This is for my enjoyment and, hopefully, the enjoyment of others. I do not receive a profit.\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>Das Boot<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Arianna felt her Human Entry Vehicle shudder violently as it slammed into the ocean. The roaring and crashing of the breakers was amplified as it reverberated around her SOEIV pod. Satan's Cradle, it was called. Now she knew why.<p>

The pod ferried her down into hell, going much more slowly now that Requiem's unnamed ocean had all but ripped it to shreds. Arianna's sensation of gravity was all but gone, and she couldn't feel any motion from the pod. The small window on the front didn't reveal anything through the murky blue, and the video feed from the other SPARTANs' helmets had cut out while the pod had slowly sunk towards the bottom of the ocean.

Arianna just watched the water turn a darker and darker blue.

Suddenly, a great grey beast swam up "faster than greased lightning", as Arianna had heard the marines say. It came toward the small window with such ferocity that Arianna bonked her purple-and-white-helmeted head against the head restraint as her instincts caused her to jerk back even though the mass of teeth could not possibly get through the transperisteel windows or ceramic shell.

After the beast got bored of attacking the pod, it swam away. As it turned, Arianna identified it as a large fish resembling a shark. However, the fact that it was on an alien-made planet, or more accurately, an alien-made Dyson Shell, suggested that it was not really a shark. The bioluminescent spots running along its underbelly supported this hypothesis. As the beast swam away, its disproportionately large tail thwacked Arianna's pod, sending it spinning well off course.

That was the last straw. Before she got too terribly lost, Arianna engaged the blast pins built into the door of the pod. Nothing happened. Suddenly, Roland's voice came over the intercom, and Arianna was momentarily confused. How had he gotten a message to her through the ocean? "Hello. You have selected 'Exit Pod' from the list of actions you cannot perform. You guys are SPARTANs, so I guess you don't want the long explanation. Basically, water pressure is keeping you from opening the door, since you are in a one atmosphere

environment surrounded by a, I don't know, a-lot-of-atmospheres environment.

"Since I figured that you wouldn't have accepted this job if we had told you exactly what you needed to do, I put this prerecorded message into your pod. Although, now that I think about it, you really do like guns, so maybe you'll like my method of escaping. Here it is. You ready?

"Shoot up the inside of your pod. Yes, you heard me right, no, I am not going rampant. All the little bullet holes will let in a buttload of water, allowing you to open your pod. Your armour should protect you. If it doesn't, well, you have my deepest condolences. This is Roland, the most awesomest A.I. ever, signing off." Arianna sighed. Only one way out. His way.

She pulled out the submachine gun nestled in her pod and emptied an entire clip into the walls of the pod. Water started leaking in, but it was slow going, so Arianna emptied another clip, this time into the ceiling. The waiting game was still too long, so she just shot all the bullets that came with the gun into the pod's panelling. Five minutes later, the pod was filled with water. Arianna slammed both fists into the door. This time, it flew off, and, after unbuckling the last of her restraints, Arianna swam out with nothing but her DMR and a Thruster Pack that had seemed an appropriate choice for an underwater fight. Her armour was heavy, but Arianna felt the gel layer of her suit inflate to create a neutral buoyancy as she swam into the water.

It was almost too murky for even her genetically modified eyes, so Arianna turned on her helmet lights. Two glowing beams cut through the dark water, revealing a large silvery fish. Its scales glimmered as it turned, swimming away as fast as it could. Arianna frowned as no dot appeared on her motion tracker. The water must have interfered with the motion tracker. As such, Arianna was surprised when she caught sight of something green and yellow swimming towards her. Unsure of how hostile the creature might be, Arianna pulled out her DMR and pointed it at the figure, which grew nearer and nearer to her. Whatever it was, it swam deliberately. It must have been attracted to the lamps attached to her helmet. Arianna promptly turned them off, hoping the beast would grow bored of looking for prey in the dark.

Suddenly, a hand gripped Arianna's shoulder. She reacted violently, reaching back to grab the arm of her attacker. Arianna attempted to flip the arm and body over her shoulder and onto the floor in front of her. As effective as the move was on land, water resistance made the grab impossible. Instead, the hand spun her around so that she was facing . . . Juliette.

No words were spoken. None could be, but none needed to be. Instead, Arianna followed Juliette down. The water got even darker, so Arianna turned her lights back on as a supplement to Juliette's. The pair drifted down through the murk with nothing but swords of light to cut through the darkness, suspended as though by invisible wires.

At last, Pearlman and Brady reached their goal. A city of light shone through the darkness, clearly illuminating the target.

Three dark figures blocked the light, and it was to them that the

women swam. When the pair got to the threesome, there was a brief moment of pause as the five acknowledged each other. Five wraiths clad in the aegis of demons then slid through the murky depths, ready to assault the city of light built by gods.

When the SPARTANs got within fifty metres of the underwater base, a group of black dots picked its way out of one of the airlocks and picked its way to the SPARTANs. A few moments of swimming brought the two parties into contact. A swarm of Jackals wearing pressure suits and wielding plasma pistols intercepted the five SPARTANs.

Pearlman didn't hesitate. She whipped her DMR out and shot at the lead Jackal. Nothing happened. Pearlman pulled the trigger again. Still nothing. Glancing over, Pearlman saw Kahn investigating his Battle Rifle, holding the gun up to the red eyes of his visor. Brady was holding her combat knife ready, Reynolds had his shotgun hefted, and Quin was checking the magazine of a MD6 Magnum since his sniper rifle's high velocity rounds would shatter when they met the added resistance of water. Water. Shit. Of course guns wouldn't work underwater. The powder was wet.

Unfortunately, Jackals didn't use gunpowder. Plasma began to boil through water as the Jackals swam closer and closer. Pearlman dropped her DMR and swam as quickly as she could toward the Jackals, trying to dodge plasma fire as best she could. Sadly, the water made her slower without hindering plasma. Pearlman's shields fell. If the Jackals had concentrated fire on her, she would have died. As it was, their fire was divided, globules of plasma being aimed at all five approaching SPARTANs. Plasma clipped Pearlman's shoulder, burning through her armour. It burned, hurting so much that it was impossible to fight the pain.

But SPARTANs were trained to do the impossible. Ignoring the panic of her flesh, Pearlman grabbed a Jackal and punched it. The Jackal went limp, allowing her to use it as a shield. Pearlman wrenched the gun from its death-grip and began to fire at the other Jackals. From the corner of her eye, Pearlman saw Brady plunge her knife into a Jackal while Reynolds slammed his shotgun into another.

Once her shields were charged, Pearlman let the dead Jackal drift. Engaging her Thruster Pack, Pearlman flew into the mêlée. She pulled the trigger of her plasma pistol and held it down. Once it built up charge, Pearlman released it into the centre of the mass of Jackals. One died and Pearlman snatched its plasma pistol out of the dead Jackal's gloved hand. She started firing at every Jackal she could see until nothing but four other SPARTANs remained alive. Corpses went drifting by and by.

Pearlman shook off a feeling of foreboding and swam for the airlock with the other SPARTANs. They faced no opposition when they entered the airlock. It was filled with water, so Kahn swam to the side in an attempt to find the control panel, allowing him to drain the airlock.

All of a sudden, Kahn flew against one wall, struggling against nothing. An energy sword appeared out of thin water and Kahn grabbed just below the hilt, trying to hold it back. After a moment of struggle, Kahn twisted the blade into his invisible attacker, causing the Active Camo to fail. A dead Special Ops Elite drifted off of Kahn. He held up three fingers. The message was clear. Spec Ops

Elites traveled in threes. There were probably two more.

Pearlman whipped around, searching for the telltale haze that indicated Active Camo. Empty water, Kahn, Quin, more empty water, Reynolds, even more empty water, and then Kahn again. Nothing. Wait, a haze. As Pearlman leveled her stolen plasma pistol and was about to fire when part of the haze was replaced by a dead Elite. Pearlman was confused for only a moment, because Brady's Active Camo unit failed shortly after.

Suddenly, the bad feeling returned. Pearlman twitched, reacting to an unseen force, a feeling that an attack was coming. She began to charge one of the pistols, just in case. A single line of blue plasma flew by her head right after she moved, hit the side of the airlock, and rebounded at an odd angle. Pearlman turned, firing the overcharged plasma pistol in the direction of the shot. A stealthed Elite carrying a Beam Rifle was uncloaked by the electromagnetic pulse. While her first pistol cooled down from the overcharge, Pearlman unloaded the second into the Elite. It died and Quin grabbed its drifting beam rifle.

Kahn swam over to the panel and hit a button. The outer door slid shut and the water began to drain. Five SPARTANs swam to the surface. A set of stairs that started just below the water level was carved into the circular wall. The SPARTANs ascended the stairs and found themselves on a solid metal catwalk that wrapped around the airlock. A door stood near the stairwell. It opened silently, admitting Brady, Reynolds, Quin, Pearlman, and Kahn.

The Forerunner installation was made of their sleek metal and had an omnipresent glow that lighted the area without casting a shadow.

"So what? Search every room?"

Kahn replied to Brady's query. "No. I have a better idea. Let's find the control room. I think I can hack the security cameras in here to find out if Glassman went this way. Palmer did say that there were security cameras here that allowed Roland to find this place, right?"

Pearlman sighed. "Yes, but why would we need to go down here if Lasky had eyes everywhere?"

"Because of the water. Duh."

"The Forerunners can build planets. I'm pretty sure they can overcome water garbling transmissions."

"Can't hurt to try," Kahn said as he shrugged before heading down the hall. Everyone followed behind him, stolen weapons at the ready.

Kahn led the way, taking twists and turns with hardly a moment's pause. When questioned about it, his only response was, "The airlock's mechanism had a map, and I have an uncanny memory."

After several more turns, the first challengers to be met were a group of Grunts pushing a series of crates along. Brady dashed forward, taking them all by surprise and gently lowering each body to the floor. Her boots were the loudest sound during her ordeal. Brady

casually wiped the blue blood off of her knife on the body of one of the Grunts as she asked, "So, why are there so few enemies?"

As Reynolds conveyed her question to Quin, Kahn spoke up. His deep voice seemed to have gone up an octave and he stuttered a bit as he spoke. "Um . . . Maybe it's a . . . uh . . . skeleton crew. You know . . . not many people because . . . uh . . . its top-secret or . . . you know . . . not busy. I hear that after twenty-seven years of war, things can . . . kinda dip into recessions."

Reynolds passed the message on to Quin and replied in a guarded voice, "Yeah, maybe."

A few hallways and a group of dead Jackals later, Kahn had successfully led Fireteam Nebula to the control room. The door admitted them, revealing six Elites in golden armour working diligently at consoles. Suddenly, an alarm at one of the consoles began to beep. The Elite turned and roared a challenge at the five SPARTANs. Even a Pearlman brought her plasma pistol to bear on the Elite at the nearest set of controls, it turned, drawing a storm rifle and leveling it at her head.

All hell broke loose. Brady's jumping at the closest Elite seemed to trigger an all-out, every-man-woman-and-child-for-his-or-herself, good-old-fashioned brawl. Even as she drove her knife home into the chest of the Elite, it pulled the trigger on its rifle, quickly depleting Brady's shields with a hail of fiery death. Another Elite slammed into Brady as she got up off of its dead comrade. The pair flew a metre or two away and the Elite drew its energy sword and lifted it in preparation for stabbing Brady, who was a bit stunned by the blow.

Pearlman fired her Thruster Pack, causing her to fly into the Elite, headbutting it off of Brady, who got up and picked up her knife. Pearlman found herself on top of the Elite, so she punched it once in the face before sticking her plasma pistol into its mouth and blowing its brains out execution style.

Rising, Pearlman saw Kahn and Reynolds ganging up on one of the four remaining Elites, circling round it and firing solicited plasma weaponry at it. It couldn't run the risk of charging at one of them without the other getting behind it and assassinating it. They were fine. Brady was going knife to energy sword with another, and two were ganging up on Quin. Normally, he would be able to headshot the both of them with the Beam Rifle, but these Elite Generals would each take three shots, something that Pearlman knew couldn't be done with a beam rifle. She began charging both plasma pistols, firing them across the room at the Elites stalking closer and closer to Quin. The moment their shields overloaded, Quin took two headshots and two bodies fell a moment later.

In quick succession, Reynolds and Brady each felled their opponent, and the room was cleared. Kahn rushed to one of the consoles and began hitting hard-light buttons. Although he had pressed about eight different controls, nothing had yet happened, no screens had popped up.

Reynolds asked, "Well, do you have security camera footage or not?"

Kahn replied, "I don't, but that isn't my goal." He hit one last button.

"Then what was?" Reynolds inquired.

A new voice, feminine, came from the shadows. "He was saving me."

\* \* \*

><p><strong>AN: I did it! I had a cliffhanger! Mostly because the underwater portion was fun to write, but it took a while, so I didn't want to leave you for too long. As always, please inform me of irregularities, grammar mistakes, spelling mistakes, factual errors, etcetera.\*\*

\*\*On that note, I noticed that I capitalise the names of some weapons and not others. Would someone please tell me the rules for capitalising weapon names since I can't find those rules? Thanks!\*\*

## 10. Ancillary AttachÃ©

\*\*A/N: I just heard a story on the radio about fan fiction and copyright laws. I do hope that the site doesn't get shut down.\*\*

\*\*But I digress. Enjoy.\*\*

\*\*Disclaimer: I am in no way affiliated with Microsoft, Bungie, or 343 Industries. This is for my enjoyment and, hopefully, the enjoyment of others. I do not receive a profit.\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>Ancillary AttachÃ©<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Quin <em>heard<em>. The sensation was completely new. It was . . . it was exquisite. There was nothing like it, for as the blind man describes sight, so too does the deaf man describe sound. It is completely new, and completely indescribable. The voice was nothing expected. It was cool as the rushing water, as vibrant as the autumn trees. The voice was alive.

A new voice intruded upon his ears. "And who are you?" Like the first, it was gentle, almost feminine, but the new voice was a little more weary, and held a certain tone of incredulity that the calm first voice had not. Quin saw Brady's green Venator helmet move in sync with the words.

The first voice responded from the shadows. How Quin knew it was from that area, he knew not, but as he peered into the shadows in the corner, Quin saw movement. It was an orb of burnished steel. It bobbed with the rhythm of its voice. "I am 862 Fractured Dream. I watched as [Lucifer fell from the heavens]. I have kept him chained [with a crown of thorns]. Sadly, my duty could not be completed, for [the meddlers] came and locked me away here so that they could unleash [a devil to fight a demon]."

Some of the words from the voice were distorted and pulled on strains of Quin's memory against his will, almost as though the orb had pulled the words from his head. As it floated closer, Quin recognised it as a Monitor, similar to 343 Guilty Spark, whom he had seen in multiple videos. The only differences that Quin could see were in the "eye". Fractured Dream's "eye" was light pink and ruddy orange and faint lilac all at once. Fractured Dream was the colour of dawn, while Guilty Spark's "eye" had only been blue. When Quin's Deadeye helmet zoomed in on Fractured Dream, Quin saw that the symbol was quite different. A line bisecting two concentric circles, equilateral triangle superimposing the centre.

A question filled Quin's mind, and for the first time, he heard his voice. His helmet barely distorted the cautious, gentle tones that reminded him of the first steps of an infant. "How . . . how am I hearing this?"

Fractured Dream responded, "I have hacked into the [wetware] embedded in your armour." Quin felt that abrasive tugging on his mind again as Fractured Dream continued, "I understand that you do not wish to hear, but I am afraid that I cannot use your hand signals, Reclaimer. It is a curious method of communication. I am not quite sure why you would not wish to be able to hear all of the time.

"But I am but a lowly Monitor. It is not my duty to question Reclaimers such as yourselves. Now come. We must escape my prison, for time is short, and the duties of controlling [Requiem] are many."

Yet another voice impeded upon Quin's senses. This one was deep, gruff, not like the softer voices of Fractured Dream and Brady or the cautious tone his own voice used. Kahn's E.O.D. helmet bobbed as he said, "When you hacked my armour in the airlock, you promised that you would tell us if Glassman was taken here."

"He was not. This research station became my prison. [The meddlers] have a far loftier goal for your doctor. They are brutes, but they are cunning. They would not simply chain one so useful as a Reclaimer. No. He will work for them . . . or he will be executed."

Fractured Dream then turned and floated down the hall from which the SPARTANs had come. The halls were still clear because, "No one wishes to guard [an ancilla] that is segregated from its installation. With the uncertainties of the ocean keeping me from being found by Reclaimers, a [skeleton crew] was all that [the meddlers] needed."

Once at the airlock, Fractured Dream shot a blue bolt of light at the door. It unlocked and Fractured Dream immediately floated into the water. Quin hoped it was waterproof. Kahn leapt after it, landing feet-first in the water. The others followed suit and began swimming through the water and out of the airlock. Fractured Dream went forward until it was well out of the well-lit Forerunner research station. Five SPARTANs followed closely behind.

After leaving the brilliance of the underwater prison, Fractured Dream floated directly up. Although their armour was heavy, the SPARTANs followed. Eventually, light began to filter through to the



inky water surrounding the group.

They broke the surface, and Brady extricated the disk from the carry case on her leg. She depressed the button and a red blinking light appeared. A voice crackled on, sounding horribly staticky, even to Quin. The transmitter was probably of a very poor quality, but it got the message across. "Hello Nebula! This is Roland, and I will be your captain for today. Please, sit back and enjoy the--"

Another voice interrupted Roland's. "Piss off, Roland. I'm captain, and Nebula's not done yet. I don't know what they did down there, but a gun encampment just . . . appeared while they were down there looking for Glassman."

Kahn nearly shouted in that really gruff voice of his to be heard over Captain Lasky and the crashing of breakers. "Whom we didn't find!"

Lasky continued through the static. "So I will need you to destroy the encampment before I can have you picked up."

Roland finished the conversation. "The energy readings match Forerunner anti-air units, so be careful. Good luck."

The transmitter fell silent and Brady put it away before asking, "So, does anyone know where this gun encampment is?"

Fractured Dream turned and responded, "Energy readings suggest that it is in this direction. Please, follow me."

Three minutes. That was how long it took to get to a small island with a tower standing proudly in the centre. Five metal structures with empty lateral lines floated around the top of the tower, each one the point of a star. The structures pulled back and then sprung forward, bright orange hard-light bolts pulsing along the middle and firing into the empty air, probably at the \_Infinity\_.

"Only Promethean Knights and Reclaimers may enable or disable [Requiem's] defences. Each one must be turned off using a control panel connected to the gun. There will certainly be defences around the guns that must be turned off. I will aid in what way I can."

As Quin climbed onto the island, a group of Crawlers materialised. Even as he moved to pull the Beam Rifle off of his back, plasma swarmed the Crawlers, decimating the entire pack. Pearlman, Reynolds, and Kahn moved forward to scavenge weapons off of the defeated A.I. Kahn came back with a suppressor, while Pearlman and Reynolds each dual-wielded boltshots.

Five SPARTANs and a Monitor made quick work of the Crawlers filling the first floor of the tower. The second floor, however, was far more challenging.

Quin swept the second story with his beam rifle as he led the way up the steps. A stark metal hallway and austere lighting. Suddenly, a blueish orb appeared, and a Knight warped out of it. The Knight wore a hard-light headdress, marking it as a Battlegroup. Quin leveled his gun and smoothly pulled the trigger. Blue light flared, but the Knight's shields didn't break. Instead, it bent down and opened its back. The flaps on its back shifted open and flipped open. Bloody

orange light spilled out, and a Watcher with orange rings for wings rose out.

Quin watched with fascinated revulsion, unable to shoot. But as the Watcher began to fly toward the group, Quin realigned his beam rifle and plugged the Watcher like a clay pigeon. It broke before it could do any harm. Sadly, it also emptied Quin's beam rifle.

Luckily, Fractured Dream's eye laser was more than enough to kill the weakened Knight. Quin walked over and grabbed its scattershot. It would have to do for now.

The group moved forward, toward the steps at the far end of the hall. A group of Crawlers descended from shadowy alcoves, and a Knight Lancer accompanied them, teleporting in. Quin stood back and watched as Pearlman and Reynolds started pegging Crawlers. Suddenly, the Knight drew its sword arm back and bent down low, as though it was going to sprint towards the group.

It dashed zigzag towards Quin, almost teleporting from point to point. It swung, and Quin backpedalled, firing wildly. The Knight dissolved after two shots. Quin stepped over the body and blew a Crawler away, when, all of a sudden, a beam of hard-light bounced between his legs. Quin looked up in time to see Reynolds shoot the Crawler Snipe. Quin nodded his thanks, picked up the binary rifle, and tossed the scattershot to Reynolds. He caught it, turned, and shot, killing the Crawler Prime that was jumping at him.

Another few minutes of furiously fighting the Crawlers and occasional Knight led the group to the third floor. They were met by a group of Watchers, who proceeded to bring turrets online and summon Crawlers out of the ground. Kahn shouted, "I got this!" and tossed three grenades into the general area: one fragmentation grenade and two pulse grenades.

The lead Watcher caught the fragmentation grenade and was beamed by the first pulse grenade. This caused it to drop the fragmentation grenade into a pack of Crawlers. The pulse grenade detonated in midair, taking out a few Watchers and allowing the third grenade to sail into a turret surrounded by Crawlers. That grenade and the fragmentation grenade blew up, decimating quite a few enemies.

Brady jumped into the confusion and proceeded to stab several Crawlers to death with her combat knife. She even leapt into the air and jammed her knife into one of the few remaining Watchers before the rest of Nebula could come and help.

Quin stood back and let the others have their fun so that he could save precious ammunition. Once the hallway was clear, Reynolds led Brady, Pearlman, Kahn, Fractured Dream, and Kahn up their last set of stairs, onto the roof. It was empty except for a Forerunner console in the exact middle. The five guns floated several metres away from the roof, well out of arm's reach.

"Please, give me a minute. I will need to bypass the security so that you can turn the guns off." Fractured Dream floated over to the console and zapped it with a blue spark. The machinery hummed and floating buttons appeared on the edges of the building. Quin rushed to the nearest one and depressed it. The gun dissolved into drifting petals of hard-light. Quin saw the others pushing their own buttons

and turning off their own anti-air guns.

A motion caught his eye. A Knight Battletwagon had just teleported in. Quin turned, aiming his binary rifle, but it was too late. The Knight's incineration cannon flashed and a globule of hard-light flew towards Fractured Dream, who was still floating over the central console, muttering, "Oh. That is not good. I had no idea that that was happening."

With a resounding \_boom\_, the incineration cannon's projectile detonated on Fractured Dream, sending smaller concussive blasts bouncing around. Fractured Dream whirled around, metal casing beginning to break. Its eye glowed, and a beam of energy shot out at the Knight. The Knight dodged left and Quin pulled the trigger on his binary rifle. It would have been a clean headshot if Knights had real heads. As it was, the Knight's shields broke and Quin was stuck reloading his binary rifle.

The Knight's incineration cannon finished cooling and it fired again just before Quin pegged it with his binary rifle. Even as the Knight Battletwagon disintegrated, Quin tracked the explosive hard light. It slammed into the already damaged Fractured Dream, who started to disintegrate into flakes of hard-light. Quin's hearing shut down and he was covered in blessed silence.

A minute later, a Pelican touched down on the roof with an open ramp. Quin watched as Reynolds signed, /Stephenson says, 'Excellent job, Nebula. It's a pity that Glassman wasn't there, but you can't help that. I'll see you on \_Infinity\_,\ to him.

As the Pelican lifted off and out of the fight, Edward was grateful that he couldn't hear anymore. It was wonderful, but it was too much, and the UNSC \_Infinity\_ would be even louder.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>AN: Sorry for leaving everyone on a sort-of cliffhanger, but I had a bit of writer's block.\*\*

\*\*As always, please tell me how I am writing so that I can improve said writing.\*\*

## 11. Separated at Invasion

\*\*A/N: No, I won't be filling this with descriptions of the War Games. We have all played enough of those, and I want new, interesting stuff.\*\*

\*\*On the subject, you can actually download Laser Flag. I built the game type and quite like playing it. Please enjoy both the story and the game type.\*\*

\*\*For context, I think Halsey had a small guard around her room even before she was put in gaol.\*\*

\*\*Disclaimer: I am in no way affiliated with Microsoft, Bungie, or 343 Industries. This is for my enjoyment and, hopefully, the enjoyment of others. I do not receive a profit.\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>Seperated at Invasion<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Raj groaned, massaging his shoulder. "You all right?" Logan asked.<p>

Raj shrugged, wincing as his shoulder cried out in pain. "Mostly. That last War Game had a lot of guns pointed at my shoulder. The phantom pains really stink."

Logan nodded his head in acknowledgement. "Tell me about it. I was actually glad we got guard duty so that I wouldn't have to do go through the War Games right now. You?"

Raj set his helmet on the bench and sat down. Although it was technically against regulations to sit down while on guard duty, Raj's muscles ached. Besides, Halsey was a boring prisoner, just sitting there tapping on her data pad. It was also against regs to not wear a helmet, but Palmer never followed that rule and Logan had assured Raj that it was okay.

"Personally, I just hope we get a mission. Sitting at base is boring, and I like a bit of action. The War Games never get new rules."

Logan shifted, moving to sit down opposite Raj. "Well, have you tried Grifball?" Raj nodded. "Rock 'n' Rail?" Another nod. "Binary Slayer? Because that's my favourite." Raj just nodded for third time. "Oh, what about Laser Flag?"

"Laser Flag? Is it new?"

Logan nodded in earnest, causing his orange curls to bounce gently. "Yes. Some SPARTAN named Kinvar created it. Basically, it's like laser tag, but with deadly weapons. No contact, just Spartan Lasers and Capture the Flag."

Raj started. "Oh! I like Spartan Lasers, but they don't have the charge time and shot capacity to be useful. So I have been working on this for quite some time." Raj pulled a cylindrical contraption out of the storage box on the leg of his armour with a flourish.

Logan peered down at the contraption and asked, "What is that?"

Raj shrugged his shoulders as he said, "A prototype. Do you remember that ONI Secure Facility that was broken into two years ago?"

"The one that turned into a huge mess because some of the brass was convinced that Innies had orchestrated the break-in?"

Raj nodded and said, "Yes. The only thing that was stolen were plans for the M6 Grindell/Galilean Nonlinear Rifle. I know because, well, I was the thief. Dumb A.I. are really easy to spoof. Once I had the plans, I started working on my miniature Spartan Laser, but I have had some difficulty. It didn't work well enough to fry a Grunt two days ago during my turn to watch the area known as Sniper Alley."

"Ah. And how was babysitting?"

"Boring as all get out. We all just stood around taking potshots at the Covenant brave or stupid enough to attack the area. I killed a grand total of two Grunts in the ten hour shift."

Things lapsed into silence for a minute while Halsey tapped away at her data pad.

Eventually, Logan asked, "So, have you figured out the history behind Marcus and Cara that we were so randomly introduced to?"

Raj gave a low chuckle before responding. "Oh yeah. I eavesdropped on their conversation in the vents. I just followed Marcus at a safe distance until I he climbed a crate and opened a maintenance panel in the ceiling. Then I listened.

"I heard his voice first. 'Hello, Cara. Please, do tell me what happened to you,' he said.

"She responded, 'The day we . . . were separated, I saw my mother frantically signalling me to come to her. As I ran, I looked back and saw a Jackal claw your face. It was . . . horrible. In fact, I was about to turn around and help you when a great beast with leathery skin jumped in the way. It had on vibrant blue armour and was facing the other way. I now realise that that was an Elite, and if it hadn't been turned around, I would be dead. Even though neither of us had seen one, I knew I couldn't possibly fight it. So I ran back towards mom, who was cowering under one of the covered picnic tables.

"'I have no idea how long we huddled like that, but at some unknown signal, probably silence, my mother peeked out from under the tablecloth and had me come out too. There was a mangled body that was only just recognisable as Charles. Other than that, there were piles of . . . of burnt human. It smelt awful, and I couldn't see how you had escaped the notice of the Elite. I assumed you were dead, but that didn't stop me from looking.

"'I signed up to join the Marines, the Navy, even the Army, in an attempt to find that Elite and wring his neck until he told me what had happened to you.' Her voice turned bitter here, Logan. 'But I was rejected time and time again on account of my hearing, until, at last I found out about the SPARTAN-IV program.

"'I signed up and they augmented me and did a really complex surgery on my inner ear so that I can hear in the heat of battle. The surgery probably cost as much as my set of personalised armour.

"'I have no clue if I ever did find that Elite, but the Storm Covenant's rampant genetic modifying so that the Elites have scales leads me to believe that I probably won't find the Elite. I mean, I don't even remember any distinguishing characteristics about him like a neck tattoo.' Marcus snorted before Cara asked him his life story.

"I left then because I didn't want to get caught and I have already heard Marcus's sob story. Basically, he didn't want Cara to be attacked by that Jackal, so he jumped it, beat the living shit out of it, couldn't find Cara, and ran, at which point he was

evacuated."

Logan nodded and then stood up, saying, "Mealtime for the professor." Raj nodded to Logan's retreating back and then stood up and waited for Logan to return. The shift was almost over.

Logan came back carrying a tray. Raj pressed the button to open the door and Logan stepped through. Halsey looked up at the \_whoosh\_ of the door sliding open and noted the tray. She set down her data pad and crossed the small room, sitting at the small, utilitarian table. As Logan put the tray down in front of her, she said a quiet, "Thank you." Logan stepped back through the door and Raj pressed the button again. The door slid shut.

Now all Logan and Raj had to do was wait to be relieved. In preparation, the pair grabbed their helmets and put them on.

They didn't have long to wait. Two SPARTANs, one in dark blue Ranger armour, the other in black and dark red Infiltrator armour, came down the hall.

As they neared, the one in blue said, "Captain wants the two of you in hangar 10. Something about a mission." Logan and Raj practically ran towards hangar 10, excited as they were for something new, even if it was a bit deadly.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>AN: Short chapter, just an interlude. Please tell me if you notice any mistakes. Thanks.\*\*

## 12. The Start of Something New?

\*\*A/N: Sorry if it seemed like I was procrastinating. I was simply writing my one-shot Behind Her Glasses and just couldn't stop to write this. Sorry, but please, do enjoy.\*\*

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\* \* \*

><p>The Start of Something New?<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Brady pulled the trigger and blew away another Flood form. She eyed the clock on her HUD and watched as it counted down. She had a good minute left, but at least she wasn't alone. Raj had pulled guard duty, Marcus had slipped off somewhere, Quin was playing Team Snipers, and Pearlman had been alpha Flood, but Pintelli from Fireteam Opalescent had her back.<p>

Suddenly, her motion tracker went wild, filled with blue dots as a motion tracker jammer created "ghosts" on her radar. Brady whipped around, searching for the telltale rippling of Active Camo. She couldn't see anything but Pintelli doing the same.

A Flood form came through a doorway recessed in the wall and used a Thruster Pack to get up to right in front of Brady. She had just enough time to put up a hard light shield before the Flood cut at her. Pintelli blew it to bits, but it was too late.

The trap had been sprung, and three invisible Flood jumped off the roofs of nearby buildings and cut right through Brady, and then Pintelli.

The scenario finished and the pods began to slide open one by one, admitting the combatants into the open area. A SPARTAN in bright gold Operator armour with a Frost visor stood in the middle of the room. As Juliette climbed out of her pod, the SPARTAN walked over to her and Arianna. He, for his voice was distinctly male, said, "Palmer told me to tell you that she needs Fireteams Nebula and Opalescent for an 'all-quiet' mission."

Arianna took off her helmet and asked, "And what is an 'all-quiet' mission?"

The other SPARTAN nodded and said, "A mission that Lasky wants hushed up so as to avoid a stir or alert the Covenant to our moves. Don't ask me what the mission is, because all I know is that you need to report to hangar 10 for deployment as soon as possible. Good luck." He climbed into Juliette's now vacated pod.

Arianna and Juliette told Blake to come with them and rushed out of the room. Edward and Jesus came out of one of the nearby rooms and met up with the others. The five SPARTANS were soon joined by Marcus, who said a quiet, "Good bye," to Cara as he came upon the group. Raj and Logan ran up from behind a moment later. Logan nodded towards Jesus and held up three fingers. Jesus nodded twice, his deep brown eyes laughing at something. Logan put down one finger, then another. As he put down the third, Whitney ran out of a hallway with Danny trailing behind her, one arm reaching. It would have been funny, considering the fact that both were in full pink or brown armour, but Juliette couldn't laugh when she watched Edward cringe despite his own ice-blue Deadeye armour. Blake leant down and whispered into her ear, his light Italian accent almost tickling her ear. "The pair have been fighting ever since the truth about Danny's past with Edward came to light. It's almost amusing, if it weren't so sad." Whitney and a reluctant Danny joined the group and all ten walked into hangar 10 together.

Commander Palmer greeted them in the hangar. "I have called you all here for this secret mission because we found-" An artificial cough interrupted her and Palmer corrected herself. "-or rather, Roland found an anomaly. Please note that when I say secret, I mean as in those shows from the 1900s with 'For Your Eyes Only'. Don't even tell your handlers about this. This anomaly could create quite a stir. Roland will fill you in."

Roland, complete in his World War One era outfit, popped up on a holo-projector. "I was doing my thing. Deep space scans and so on when I detected an asteroid filled with an oxygen environment. So I did some more professional scans and detected large amounts of organic mass, you know, carbon and such, but no life.

"That isn't impossible, because you know, butter isn't alive, but it is a bit unusual.

"Normally, we would just send a marine squad in, but I am also detecting quite a few ferromagnetic data streams matching the digital footprint of Promethean Knights, Watchers, and Crawlers."

Arianna cocked her head and asked, "How many?"

Roland's avatar shrugged before responding. "I don't know. My data processors weren't equipped to count that high." At Arianna's visible gulp, he simulated a laugh and said, "No, ferromagnetic data streams are hard to get any sort of lock on, especially from long distances like this. I can tell you that they are there and there are several Prometheans, but I couldn't say how many, exactly."

Palmer took over the explanation. "There are a lot of baddies that will need to be exterminated, so we selected Nebula because Pearlman can fly her own Pelican quite well. Since this raid needs to be secret, we went ahead and are having Opalescent come along for the extra firepower that will be needed."

Palmer clapped her hands and said, "Pile into Nebula's Pelican, because this Op is a go!" Ten SPARTANs all tried to squeeze into a single Pelican, but it only seated eight. Palmer groaned and motioned toward the wall. "Some of you will have to jetpack your way to the asteroid. Be careful, because without friction or gravity, even slight miscalculations can be deadly. I will not authorise guns for the jetpackers, because the kick could also kill you since fuel is so limited."

Juliette grinned and stepped forward. "Then you will want me and who else?"

Marcus signed something to Edward and he said, "I need to be on the Pelican with Edward and Arianna is pilot. Kahn could do it, I guess."

Logan shook his head before saying, "I'll go. Whitney and Danny are far too likely to misfire their packs by accident, while Jesus and Blake can't do any killing without their guns. I bet I am the only other person who has had formal hand-to-hand combat training, in fact."

Juliette grinned as she walked over to the wall. She grabbed two jetpacks. Tossing one to Logan, she responded, "Actually, I haven't had any formal training, either." Logan's grey eyes looked at her disbelievingly for a moment before flicking up as he reached for the jetpack. He caught it, strapped it to his back, and made his way over to the bay doors.

Juliette joined him while the others clambered aboard the Pelican. Palmer shouted, "Good luck!" and Roland's hologram snapped its fingers. The bay doors slid open, revealing bleak empty space. As the Pelican turned on, Juliette leapt, followed closely by Logan.

Roland's voice came over the comm. "All right, this is the asteroid in orbit around the outside of Requiem. Marking now." A blue rhombus popped up on the HUD, and Brady fired her jetpack for just a moment. McCormac followed suit and Pearlman's Pelican thundered silently over their heads. They drifted frictionlessly for some time.



As they got closer, Roland's voice came over the comm again. "Watch out! You are now entering the data streams. I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but that means that Prometheans may come up to stop your getting to the asteroid." True to Roland's word, a Watcher floating almost aimlessly through space heralded the coming of the Prometheans.

McCormac readjusted himself and depressed the "fire" button. His jetpack's fuel reserves ignited, sending him at the Watcher. McCormac flew unerringly toward the Watcher. The silent tranquility of space lent itself to masking the violence of his approach.

Once he was close enough, McCormac simply grabbed the Watcher. He brought it close to himself and ripped it into pieces. McCormac cast the bits around himself and took the Watcher's boltshot. He fired twice to arrest his momentum before re-angling the gun. A few more shots brought him back on course, leaving only a trail of bent metal and sparking wires as evidence of his deed.

It was an unfortunate truth that the Watcher had got off a message before its core processor was destroyed. A Knight teleported close in front of Brady, who swung at it blindly. She hit, causing a blue veil to wrap the Knight in a hard light energy shield. The Knight fired its suppressor into her stomach, simultaneously lowering her shields to near critical and moving the Knight out of Brady's range.

It appeared that the Knight hadn't counted on her closing the distance again, because when Brady fired her jetpack, the lone Promethean offered no resistance. Once she was moving faster than the Knight, Brady stopped gunning the jetpack's trigger and instead drew her knife. The Knight only had time to ready its blade arm before Brady drove her knife right through the shield and into the Knight's metal plating.

She must have stabbed something vital because the Knight burst like confetti; it dissolved into flaky bits rather like the petals of some glowing flower as they fell gently off of the stem. Nevertheless, Brady grinned, Venator helmet hiding her feral look.

Brady looked around until both the objective and the Pelican were within her vision. She split the distance and shot toward where the Pelican would be. She drifted for a moment before she grabbed onto the Pelican and hastily activated the clamps in her boots. She walked onto the top of the Pelican just in time to see another Knight warp in.

Brady tried to get to it as quickly as she could, but the clamps and a lack of gun slowed her down. The Knight had enough time to bend over and begin to issue a Watcher from its backside. It was disgusting, almost like giving birth.

The Watcher flew out as the Knight pushed, metal flaps on its backside flung open.

Brady finally closed the distance, driving her knife into the Knight's backside as it started to close the flaps that were so like the birth canal of a woman: both stretched and opened up to admit a new "life" into the world. Brady's knife cut right through the shields and slipped between the metal plates. The knife cut right

through the elaborate circuits that held the Knight together. The Knight fell apart.

This time, she picked up the gun. A light rifle. She looked up just in time to see the Watcher issuing a brilliant blue data stream. Unaccustomed as she was to the light rifle, Brady's first shots went wide. She readjusted the gun and fired again, but it was a moment too late. The data stream stopped. The Promethean Souls had been sent into the fabric of the Pelican. The Souls assembled themselves by copying the metal.

Brady shifted the gun and steadied herself for the extra kick. She may have clamped herself down, but that did not create gravity to dampen the effects of Newton's third law. She fired on the approaching Crawlers, aiming at the "heads". Really, it had taken the Crawler A.I. just a few seconds to make full use of its mimetic abilities, so the Watcher's single data stream had created a small army of Crawlers led by one with spikes on its back. At this one Brady aimed.

She fired over and over at the Crawlers until they were all broken beyond repair. Then she shifted to fighting the Watcher. As she tracked it, Brady caught sight of McCormac wrestling a Knight Battlegroup a just a few metres from the side of the Pelican. Brady also saw the asteroid getting closer and closer, bigger and bigger.

At last, she found the Watcher and shot the last vestiges of ammunition at the Watcher. But it didn't die. And Brady had seen them hover and change direction suddenly enough to know that chasing the Watcher with her jetpack would waste far too much fuel. So she threw her knife again.

Like the first, it flew straight and true. Unlike the first, it slammed into a Watcher, not Logan McCormac, who was jetpacking his way back to the Pelican and asteroid. Brady could almost see past his Vanguard helmet and into the glint in his eye as her knife disassembled the Watcher.

A moment later, the Pelican slowed and landed on the asteroid, near the objective. Eight SPARTANs dashed out of the bird and met the two waiting outside at the objective. All ten engaged their clamps, although the asteroid seemed to have some sort of Earth-normal gravity, despite its size. The diamond labeled "objective" was situated over a metal hole in the asteroid.

"Hello Nebula and Opalescent!" Roland's voice cut over the comm channel and Brady saw Reynolds begin to signal Quin. Whitshire also tried to make a motion with his hands, but Donnely grabbed his arm. \_Fancy they're having a private conversation\_.

"I tagged the airlock that will lead into the asteroid, and also tried to scramble the data links, give you a bit of a breather, but really, I think that we can put the ease of your landing down to pure luck. I would suggest two teams. One to guard your ticket home and one to investigate.

"Good luck. Roland out."

There was a moment of silent deliberation before Pintelli spoke up

over the team comm in his beautiful Italian accent. "I volunteer Opalescent to guard the Pelican. Nebula can explore." Several heads nodded their assent and Reynolds signed Quin while Whitshire wasn't looking.

The hatch was heavy. It took two SPARTANs just to lift it out of the ground. It was attached to a hinge in the side. Not the simple swinging kind, but a heavy-duty Forerunner alloy hinge that could probably control a HAVOK-grade nuclear blast.

Brady jumped into the airlock first. For a room built into the floor of an asteroid, it was surprisingly roomy. Kahn dropped in next to her followed by Quin and Pearlman. Reynolds brought up the rear.

As soon as his boots contacted the floor, the heavy metal hatch swung closed again, hinges probably not protesting in the slightest. Once the hatch had sealed, a door in the side of the airlock opened up to admit the SPARTAN strike team. Although the hallway was pristine, a sense of foreboding hung over Brady's head, as though each breath would be her last.

It was the smell, she decided. As soon as the hatch had sealed and her helmet had unsealed to admit fresh air, the smell had come. It was a smell of decay, flesh rotting off of bone, but there was something more. A smell of danger. Brady couldn't describe it, but it brought back memories. Bad ones. \_Pink flesh turning green. Friends becoming foes or food, all at the whim of . . . something.\_

Brady quickly shook off the memories of the battling at Voi and advanced down the hall. There were no side halls or sealed doors. Just the one hall.

"What exactly are we looking for?"

"Didn't you hear Roland, Kahn? We are trying to find the source of all the biotic material."

"Oh. I hope it's an off-site food storage facility. I'm hungry."

Brady could just tell that Pearlman wanted to reply with another scathing comment, but was stymied when the hall abruptly ended. A single door, hexagonal in shape, stood recessed in the wall. A red light blinked, signifying that it was locked. Kahn just walked over to it and started pushing at the keypad.

Two minutes later, the door light began to blink before it switched to green. At that moment, all five motion trackers went wild. Reynolds muttered, "I thought Roland said that there was no life down here."

Brady just shrugged and said, "I have invisibility. I'll go in first, scout around. If I'm not back in three minutes, well, go ahead and send in the cavalry." Four SPARTANs backed up, and Brady activated her Active Camo. The door slid open to admit seemingly nothing.

Brady frowned. The smell was stronger here. And worse, the movement had stopped. It was as if whatever was in the room could see through Active Camo and knew a demon was coming.

Wet sounds began to play. Brady looked around, trying to find the source, when she felt something . . . slimy land on her. Even through her armour should have covered up the feeling, she just knew it should feel slimy. Maybe it was the sounds. Maybe it was the weight that was scarily familiar. Maybe it was the mortal terror that had began as soon as she had smelt the inside of the asteroid. Its icy cold grip had been loose, but it was squeezing tighter and tighter now.

With horrible apprehension, Brady looked at her shoulder. A visage that had been forever seared into both her mind and face sat calmly on her shoulder, inspecting her neck. Brady reached for her knife as quickly as possible, intending to pop it and run. But her knife wasn't there. In a flash, she saw it flying out of her hand, thrown at a Watcher. Now, though, the Watcher was welcome. Maybe it would even help. It was certainly better than \_this.\_

But as she brought her hand back up to brush the creature off, she felt a sting at the base of her neck. Her last coherent thought before the hunger took her was, '\_My second skin is already green\_'.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>AN: I'm sorry. But something about that Boston Marathon Bombing really put that in there for me. Plus, I have been listening to "Red Like Roses" by Jeff Williams. It really sets the Halo mood. Beautiful and sad with just enough hope to keep going.\*\*

\*\*Oh, and the jetpacks in this chapter are not armour abilities. They are actual jetpacks designed for space travel, which is why Brady has her Active Camo as well.\*\*

\*\*Please, please tell me how I handled that last bit, and as always, help me correct misspellings and grammar, as well as general storyline by giving feedback so that I know what I am doing wrong and right.\*\*

### 13. Nebula and the Flood

\*\*A/N: If you think that Brady couldn't be Flooded because she has had augmentations like Johnson, well, don't forget that the SPARTAN-IV augmentations were specifically designed to be as noninvasive as possible, hence the absurdly high augmentation success rate. Therefore, the Flood still recognise them as consumable targets.\*\*

\*\*Same with the genetic modification of the Storm Covenant (scaly Grunts and Elites). Anyway, enjoy.\*\*

\*\*Disclaimer: I am in no way affiliated with Microsoft, Bungie, or 343 Industries. This is for my enjoyment and, hopefully, the enjoyment of others. I do not receive a profit.\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>Nebula and the Flood<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Reynolds was worried. According to the clock on his HUD, it had been two minutes and thirty-seven seconds. He had only run a few missions with her, but Reynolds trusted Brady with his life.<p>

On the War Games deck, he had never really gotten into the stuff Kahn enjoyed like Binary Slayer, and Pearlman and Quin generally teamed up for Team Snipers - Reynolds had never been good at hitting things from long ranges. That left Brady, since Niven was a veteran, almost ready to lead a fireteam and certainly capable enough to go on more missions the Nebula could. Reynolds supposed that he could work with Opalescent, and he did, excepting Whitshire, on occasion, but there was something more familiar about working with Brady. Plus, she liked the same games he did - Team Slayer, Dominion, and Flood. He would play other games, sure, but those were his favourites.

So Reynolds was understandably worried about Brady. For an infiltration operation, he couldn't imagine her getting caught, and she wouldn't have lost track of time. Her HUD had a clock, too.

As soon as the third minute was up, Kahn rushed toward the door shouting, "Charge!" Reynolds didn't have to tell Quin anything; his HUD had a timer, and he wasn't stupid. Quin followed close behind Kahn and Pearlman. Reynolds loped close behind, shotgun at the ready. Really, it had seemed like a good idea that the only one without a gun had gone on a scouting expedition in unknown territory; accidental firings would be impossible and detection unlikely, especially considering her invisibility. Now, three short minutes later, it seemed like the worst decision that could have been made.

The door slid open at their approach. Once Reynolds entered, it closed again. Nothing greeted the four SPARTANs. No dead bodies, no bullet casings, no scorch marks, no blood puddles. There was a quiet \_squelch\_, like a gel-filled bag being crushed, but nothing else.

Quin shifted nervously and transferred his sniper rifle into his other hand before lowering it from the upright position that they had all adopted when they charged. Kahn moved up toward the centre of the room and pointed his battle rifle. The room was still empty, but the motion tracker flared again as Kahn moved. Reynolds glanced around uncertainly, looking for an alternate exit that Brady might have taken. Pearlman began to back cautiously toward the door.

It didn't open. Pearlman glanced at the door and said, "Shit." Reynolds and Kahn whipped around. The door was locked, the access panel shining red.

Kahn groaned and shouldered his battle rifle. "I'll just have to spoof it again, because the lift in the middle hasn't been used, and I can't quite figure out how to activate it, summon it from the depths of this place. I have no clue where Brady could have gone." He walked over to the door.

A loud \_crack\_ caused all three to spin around. Even though Quin hadn't known that the door was locked again, his sniper rifle was pointed toward the door. /Some . . . thing dropped from the ceiling and came crawling toward your back. It wasn't anything I've ever

seen.\

Reynolds bent down and examined the floor for a moment. This time, Reynolds said, "Shit." He continued his explanation both verbally and visually. "Quin says he saw something drop from the ceiling. I took a look at the remains of what he shot. Those aren't something you forget. I'm guessing that you, Kahn were in the army for a short time before becoming a SPARTAN, right?"

Kahn nodded. "Home Guard since 2552, once the bastards discovered Earth."

Reynolds continued. "Then I'm sure you remember the Flood. Pearlman, you ever fought them outside the War Games?"

Pearlman shook her head. "No, but I've heard about them."

"A few tips. Shoot the infection pod buried in the chest. Do not engage in close quarters combat with them. The Flood are exponentially stronger than a SPARTAN, and their liquid insides make punches and high velocity bullets ineffective. Quin, that means the sniper rifle won't be effective against combat forms. Take this."

With practiced fluidity, Reynolds stopped signing and snapped the pistol off of his magnetic hip holster before tossing it to Quin, who deftly caught it and signed, /Thank you.\

Reynolds finished his description. "Last, but not least, pray. Pray to whatever gods you believe in that there isn't a Gravemind. I must admit, though, that that would explain the presence of so many Knights, since this asteroid appears to be a Flood containment facility." At those words, the Flood went crazy.

The motion trackers became useless, showing nothing but a wall of red. Reynolds hefted his shotgun and waited. He didn't have to wait very long, though. Infection pods started dropping like rain. They started slowly but quickly built into a torrential downpour of death. Reynolds watched as Kahn and Pearlman opened fire, popping the pods until nothing but green goop was left. Reynolds didn't shoot because he wanted to save his shotgun for combat forms. Experience had taught him that infection forms tended to lead, soften up the enemy so that combat forms could wipe out stragglers. More infection pods would follow, taking the dead bodies for their own.

Sure enough, the rain dried up, and Reynolds heard Pearlman sigh with relief. "It's not done yet," he cautioned. The room grew quiet, but only for a moment. Then the lift in the centre of the room ascended from the bowels of the facility, combat forms huddled onto it.

As soon as the lift clicked into the floor, combat forms started jumping off. They took mighty leaps, but not all made it to the small group of SPARTANS. Some fell short and proceeded to shuffle over to the SPARTANS, and Reynolds even saw one's chest burst as Quin drilled a bullet into the beast. Another was blown out of the air by his own shotgun blast moments before it would have been within striking distance.

Once the initial charge had been beat back, Reynolds led the counterattack, jumping over Kahn and firing his shotgun into another

combat form. Out of the corner of his eye, Reynolds saw Kahn roll left, coming up next to Pearlman. The pair fired their battle rifles in sync, one after the other as they advanced behind Quin, who was in the middle due to his inability to hear. After all, the Flood tended to come up from behind.

This time, though, Reynolds's fears proved groundless. The four SPARTANs made great time as they advanced toward the lift. Kahn and Pearlman picked off foes with a practiced ease while Reynolds thoroughly thrashed any Flood that tried direct confrontation. The four waded through the Flood step by step, never pausing in their attempt to get to the lift.

Reynolds put a shell solidly into the last combat form, and Nebula ran the last few metres toward the lift as a single unit. As soon as Kahn, who had taken up the rear, stepped onto the platform, it began to descend, seemingly of its own accord. But when a carrier form fell down the shaft, it became clear that what was controlling the lifts was malevolent.

Reynolds, the resident Flood expert, had only enough time to shout, "Scatter!" and try to dive away before the thing detonated. Reynolds's shields were half down and he suspected that Quin and Pearlman, who had been closest, had no shielding, which would only make them prime targets for the dozen or so infection forms that had spilled out.

Kahn, at least, had fought the Flood before. He too had jumped, and Reynolds watched as his battle rifle shot seven three-round bursts right into the infection forms, protecting Quin and Pearlman from the creatures.

Reynolds signed Quin an explanation. /Carrier forms explode when you shoot them or get too close. Then infection pods spill out to attack the weakened opponents.\ Reynolds heard Kahn explain the same to Pearlman.

When the lift slowed, the attack resumed. Infection forms came crawling down the shaft while combat forms simply jumped. Reynolds began to let go of the control he normally held. He was jumping, dodging, and rolling, all while blowing ragged holes in the combat forms and stomping on any infection pods that he could. He felt hot irons across his back and turned, firing blindly at the combat form before it could hit him again. Unfortunately, there were a lot of combat forms. They came in waves, bigger and bigger as they attempted to sweep the four SPARTANs away. Another combat form struck him, and he went sailing into a wall. He heard a sickening\_crunch\_ and felt the sting of biofoam as it was injected into his right leg.

The only good thing was that he was now out of the action for a minute. Reynolds took the opportunity to finger a fragmentation grenade. He pulled the pin and shouted, "Grenade out!" before chucking it into the mass of enemies. Reynolds saw three figures covered in green goop dive out of the way before the pain in his leg filled his vision with red, despite his superhuman attempts to avoid passing out.

\* \* \*

><p>Reynolds blinked. At first, he was confused as to why the three

green Flood forms weren't attacking him. Then he blinked again and made out the patches of bright red, ice blue, and deep purple, as well as the shape of the helmets and visors.<p>

Kahn's voice came out of the one to Reynolds's left. "That was quite the injury. I tried to set the break through your armour and then injected some more biofoam, but after hitting the wall like that, well, just be glad that you're a SPARTAN.

"Oh, and thanks for warning us before flushing put those Flood with a grenade. I do believe that the lift is about to get to the middle of the facility."

True to his guess, the lift walls opened up, revealing an empty room made of Forerunner metal. The lift ground to a halt once it reached the floor, and the SPARTANS stepped off, Reynolds wincing as the extra biofoam set. As the group approached the only door, Pearlman asked, "Do you think that Brady is down here somewhere?"

Reynolds glanced at Kahn. Both gave a quiet nod and then Reynolds said, "It doesn't matter. We have to blow the facility."

"What? Why? Brady could still be here."

This time, Kahn replied. "Then God help her. A single infected ship crashed at Voi, and they glassed half a continent to contain the infection. A single Flood spore is more virulent than all human diseases put together. The entirety of the human race depends upon this one action.

"The one thing I don't understand is why the Flood escaped."

As the door slid open to admit the four, Reynolds replied to Kahn's query. "When I was just a lowly ODS who respected SPARTANS, I did a hard drop onto Gamma Halo. I met the Forerunner A.I. Abject Testament there. He was a bit off his rocker, and didn't have Flood containment completely under control.

"There was no Storm Covenant activity over there, but the Flood that had been put into stasis for study had escaped anyway. My guess is that when the Storm captured Fractured Dream, he was unable to keep this area on true lockdown and some Flood escaped from the study chambers."

Reynolds's suggestion was given support when the short hallway the SPARTANS had been walking through came to an end. The door slid open to reveal a two-storeyed room with a broken chamber in the middle. Green gasses effused from the broken glass and small objects lay strewn about. Although the room was quiet, no one relaxed.

It was with tense muscles that the SPARTANS walked around the ground floor, looking for a way out. The other three doors were locked, but Quin pointed out a shadowy stairwell in one corner. Kahn led the way, sweeping his battle rifle around the corner. Nothing.

But although nothing lurked in the shadows of that hidden stairwell, Kahn was still cautious, because the entire room felt of danger. There was just something about the green gasses and the dark lighting. Reynolds walked next to Quin and Pearlman backed up the staircase, rifle ready in case of ambush.



Personally, Reynolds was unconcerned because the Flood had yet to show any form of sentience; they hadn't even begun wielding guns, so a Proto-Gravemind was still out of the question. And they could definitely find guns, because Reynolds had recognised the corpses as reanimated members of the Storm Covenant. They had probably been an initial strike team that had failed. The Prometheans were trying to finish the fight, but Reynolds knew that to be impossible without destroying the whole asteroid.

At the moment, though, Reynolds wondered why the Flood wasn't attacking. The most exciting thing was the fact that one of the doors on the second floor was broken. That would be their method forward, since back was not an option. The door in question tried to shut as the SPARTANS got near, but it just . . . couldn't. Sparks flew as it bashed itself against some invisible door jamb over and over again. This time, Reynolds brought his shotgun to the front and shimmied through the half-open door.

As soon as he had made his way through, a combat form dropped from the ceiling to greet him. Reynolds let his shotgun say hello. Kahn pushed through next and shot somewhere over Reynolds's shoulder. Reynolds heard a small pop before Kahn moved out of the way to admit Quin. Pearlman brought up the rear. As soon as she was through, Reynolds turned, because the Flood clearly had a presence in the room.

The Flood occupation turned out to be a fairly small compliment. It took one well-placed grenade and a few three round bursts to eliminate the Flood who had been waiting for the SPARTANS. It helped that only the first combat form and a few infection pods had decided to break ranks.

Once the room was clear save a few stray bullet casings, green Flood remains, and of course, four SPARTANS, there was a collective gasp. The walls of the room were filled with floating glyphs made out of pulsing hard light. A central pedestal seemed to be the origin of the light. Kahn jumped as though zapped before saying, "I know what to do."

"About the Flood infested asteroid?"

"Yes. We need to destroy it, right?"

Two nods. Quin merely waited for the conversation to be over so that Reynolds could explain.

"Well, this room is almost certainly a control centre of sorts, so an explosion of acceptable magnitude should do the trick. And, by my calculations, the conversion of a MJOLNIR fusion reactor into a thermonuclear warhead should do the trick."

Pearlman gasped. "But, whose reactor to use?"

Kahn nodded conversationally. "I'll use my suit. I'll need to lower my shields a bit and be wary of using secondary features, but I guess an half-an-hour safety window before my suit starts to shut down due to lack of power. We will just need to get out of here quickly, but I bet I can pull up a map of the place at this pedestal. Let me check." With that, Kahn walked over to the monolith and laid his hands upon

it, ignoring the lack of buttons. His hands began to move wildly over it in patterns that escaped Reynolds's understanding.

A moment later, Kahn stepped back and pointed. "Take this door, fight your way through the hallway, turn left, activate the hard light bridge. There is a slipspace teleportation pad across it reminiscent of the ones on Trevelyan. I think I can get that to work, get us to the surface. Now quiet. I need silence to make a bomb."

Reynolds nodded and explained the plan to Quin. /Kahn will make us a bomb to blow the facility. Then we run through that door,\ Here Reynolds stopped to identify the door before continuing. /though the hallway, and then turn left, activate the bridge and get to the teleportation grid. Kahn will be using his suit's fusion reactor for the bomb, so we need to guard him with the utmost care.\ Quin nodded once before turning to face one of the closed doors. Reynolds guarded the broken door, but in the two minutes it took Kahn to build a bomb, nothing happened.

Once Kahn announced, "Finished," Reynolds tapped Quin on the shoulder and the pair followed Kahn and Pearlman out the door that Pearlman had been guarding.

The vaulted arcade was dimly lit and had a smell of abject terror, even through Reynolds's Gungnir helmet. As the group rushed through the empty hall, Kahn shouted, "I did a localised unlock and general lock, so unless the Flood knows how to hack Forerunner door systems, they will be trapped and our path will be open. The only problem is that the Flood in our area can't leave, so we'll have to kill them.

"Oh, and Reynolds, I keyed the bomb to your suit's comm frequency because you are probably the only one who will activate the detonation frequency without fail if you start to die, and a timer was far too risky. Just shoot three bursts of white noise and the asteroid will blow.

"I predict a two to three megaton blast from that tiny piece of equipment. For reference, the first atomic bomb had about a fifteen kiloton blast, so use discretion before you blow the asteroid. Make sure we are well away. Please."

As soon as his warning was finished, the remaining Flood in the room descended upon the SPARTANS. Apparently, they didn't like the idea of their asteroid being blown up. A group of carrier forms led the way. Five or six of the things waddled on stubby legs from the end of the hall. Quin aimed his new magnum and fired once, twice, thrice. The lead forms fell and detonated, causing the ones behind them to blow as well. The resulting mass of infection pods was like shooting fish in a barrel. Pearlman and Kahn didn't even aim. They just let lead fly. Six bullets later, and the resultant bursting of the pods had caused the entire swarm to be reduced to nothingness.

Then the combat forms attacked. They leapt from the shadows and ran along the hall. Reynolds motioned Kahn and his weaker shields to stay behind him and pumped his shotgun. He leveled the gun, aimed, tracked the closest one, waited for it to approach, fired. A ragged hole in the creature's chest caused it to fall. Reynolds twisted, shot the next one out of the air. He chucked a grenade, then another. Body parts flew. This time, Reynolds attacked. He ran forward, pumping the

shotgun, pulling the trigger. Buckshot flew into the face of another Flood form and Reynolds suppressed the depressing thought, '\_That could be me\_.'

By the time Reynolds paused to load more rounds into the shotgun, most of the enemy had been cleared. Unfortunately, the smell of death still made him slightly sick.

Before the smell could overwhelm him, Reynolds slammed the last shot home and ran toward the end of the hall. He felt bullets whiz over his shoulder as he threw his weight onto his right shoulder and rolled down the hall. Reynolds came up kneeling, shotgun pointed at a fearless combat form. He said, "Tell the devil I say hello," and pulled the trigger. Reynolds stood up and took a step. "Buzzards gotta eat too." \_Bang\_. Step. "This here has been a licenced zombie killing tool since the 1900s." \_Bang\_. Step. "I never said I was awesome, I just said I had a gun." \_Bang\_.

Reynolds stepped over the last combat form as it crumpled to the ground. He headed to the door, which opened without issue, the other three SPARTANs trailing behind him. Reynolds found himself atop a platform extending over a room crawling with Flood. Well aware of their jumping prowess, he whispered, "Be quiet. Very quiet," to the others and signed it to Quin, just in case.

As the others nodded, Reynolds pivoted left and pushed the hard light panel on the side of the upper catwalk. A hard light bridge issued from the far side of the chasm and approached the platform the SPARTANs stood on. Once it reached, the SPARTANs crept across it and huddled on the slipspace teleportation pad. Kahn keyed some buttons and Reynolds felt nausea for a brief moment.

When his vision cleared, Reynolds saw stars. Not dizzy stars. Space stars. He felt only a moment of relief before Roland's voice filled his helmet. "Hey, Captain!"

A groan. "What, Roland? This better not be another claim that you are still trying to get a lock on Nebula. They disappeared nearly half-an-hour ago. Pretty soon we'll have to mark them MIA, assumed KIA."

"Actually, sir, I found them. They just emerged from a micro slipspace rupture similar to the transport nodes Crimson found. The one thing, I am only reading four IFF tags. Could something have happened?"

Here Reynolds felt the need to interrupt. He keyed the "talk" button and said, "Sir. We were inside the asteroid. The problem is the Flood. Almost worse, SPARTAN Brady is now MIA, presumed KIA, although I suppose she could get to a transport pad and survive, same as we did."

Lasky's voice. "Presumed KIA? But the asteroid is still there. Just get to the Pelican. IFF transponder signals show that you are within the perimeter Opalescent set up to guard the Pelican.

"This is a general order to all Fireteams on the asteroid. Converge on the Pelican. We'll sort this out later."

Pearlman spoke up. "Actually sir, we set a bomb in the facility. We

will remotely detonate it, kill the Flood before the infection can spread. Unfortunately, SPARTAN Kahn used his own fusion pack to fuel the bomb. I'm not sure he will be able to run all the way to the Pelican."

Reynolds could almost imagine Lasky nodding before he said, "Fine. Get to the ship, get to a safe distance, and then blow the asteroid. You're right. The Flood is incredibly dangerous. I will mark Juliette-1094 as MIA."

Reynolds signed, /We are getting back to the Pelican ASAP,\ before helping Pearlman drag a mostly unresponsive Kahn toward the bird. Reynolds could only guess why the suit gave out right after teleportation.

Reynolds was glad that Opalescent had set up their perimeter. It made getting to the Pelican with a comatose Kahn much easier, although the slow pace he set allowed Opalescent to catch up to Nebula. Once at the Pelican, Reynolds unceremoniously dumped Kahn into a seat and sat next to him. As soon as everyone but McCormac was on board, Pearlman punched the engines.

After several minutes of quiet flying with Logan visible only as a yellow dot on his motion tracker, Marcus opened a white noise channel once, twice, three times. An explosion vaporised several asteroids, but the vacuum of space and the Pelican's titanium hull kept Marcus or any of the others, excepting Arianna and Logan, from knowing that the Flood threat was ended.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>AN: I think Reynolds would join the ODSTs to escape his past and try to quell his insecurities with pure badass. It didn't work (it never works), but that is why he was an ODST who looked up to SPARTANS. And how is his litany of one-liners?\*

\*\*I think my nuclear blast calculations are both possible and accurate, but please check me on that as well as any grammatical or other factual mistakes. Thank you.\*\*

#### 14. A Thorney Situation

\*\*A/N: Yeah, I've nothing . . . except that IloMilo is a beautiful game. Seriously. Buy it. Enjoy. Both the game and this story.\*\*

\*\*Disclaimer: I am in no way affiliated with Microsoft, Bungie, or 343 Industries. This is for my enjoyment and, hopefully, the enjoyment of others. I do not receive a profit.\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>A Thorney Situation<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Arianna tossed and turned in her bed. Well, it wasn't really a bed. Just her bunk aboard the <em>Infinity<em>. But that didn't change the fact that she wasn't going to get any sleep tonight. She

was becoming resistant to the drugs. She took them nightly to get to sleep without dreams, because sleep with dreams was no sleep at all.

She had taken sleeping drugs for years, claiming insomnia. But it seemed as though her SPARTAN augmentations had included the ability to build up a resistance to the drugs. So she regretfully dragged herself off of the bunk and peeled off her nighttime clothes. A silent stroll around the ship would do her some good, she decided, but her pyjamas wouldn't do. If someone on the "night" shift (even though space didn't technically have a night, the ship still had a fourteen hour active cycle and a ten-hour sleep cycle run by a skeleton crew) saw her in just her camisole, it would raise serious questions. So she crossed to the wardrobe and put on her black elastic undersuit, struggling to keep her blonde hair out of the collar line. After a small victory, Arianna went to the door and punched in her code.

Without a destination in mind, she wandered. She stopped at the mess hall, but it was too early for the staff to start cooking. The lights were dim and the tables were silent, unlike any other time she had seen the kitchen area. The War Games rooms were all locked. The bridge was always off-limits. Arianna eventually found herself staring at the cool light of the engines from the observation room. Something about the way the blue light washed over the burnished metal of the \_Infinity\_ and danced about the large chamber calmed her.

Apparently, it calmed Captain Lasky, too. A few minutes after she had lowered herself to the floor, the door slid open and admitted him. Although he seemed surprised, he quickly shook it off and sat down next to Arianna. There was a quiet, companionable silence.

At last, Lasky opened his mouth. "I read your file. Insomnia." Arianna shook her head. Lasky guessed again. "Bad dreams?"

Arianna corrected him in a quiet voice, violet eyes filled with pain. "Memories."

Lasky nodded. "Madrigal."

In an effort to change the subject before it went too far, Arianna asked, "And why are you down here?"

"Fireteam Crimson."

"What about them?"

"During a standard op, they recovered SPARTAN Gabriel Thorne's IFF tag, but no body. Other fireteams have gone missing, but they have always been doing ops. The fact that someone could go missing from the ship is troubling."

"So I sent them, the best of the best, to look into it. And they got captured. I have Roland looking for them, but I doubt that anything conclusive will turn up for a while, considering that he is also looking for all other missing fireteams and has found almost none."

"Do you want me to look for Thorne? I'm guessing that if you sent

Crimson to look for him, there was some sort of trail that the other missing fireteams didn't leave behind."

"Yes, actually. The tracks suggest a couple possible locations, but after Crimson's disastrous rescue attempt, I didn't feel it would be safe to send another fireteam in."

Arianna nodded in understanding. "I volunteer. If you send in a small strike force tonight, well, we might catch them by surprise. Plus, I can fly the dropship. Fewer people will have to be woken up."

Lasky slowly uncrossed his legs as he said, "I'll have Roland wake up your team and brief you on possible locations. The override code for your hangar is 37-JW-99M. Get dressed and get to your bird." Arianna nodded and stood up.

Fifteen minutes later, four SPARTANs dressed in the trappings of war were gathered in hangar 10, listening to Roland speak. "Currently, I believe SPARTAN Thorne to be at coordinates 84 degrees, 33 minutes, North latitude and 72 degrees, 19 minutes, East longitude. Translation: Covenant cruiser in geosynchronous orbit above Requiem's tundra area. Although not the closest to the location of Thorne's IFF tag, the in-atmosphere ship is highly suggestive. However, that will mean you will have to land your Pelican a ways away to avoid detection.

"Good night, and good luck. This is Roland, signing off." His avatar flickered out. Pearlman dashed into the pilot's seat and strapped in. She waited for the three green lights to indicate that the others were ready, and then she pushed the throttle to full. \_It felt good to be behind the controls\_.

As soon as her Pelican had made it out of the \_Infinity\_'s hangar, Pearlman twisted the Pelican so that it dove nose down into Requiem's gravity well. She felt the G-force build and her suit increased its pressure in an effort to keep her safe. It was exhilarating, but dangerous. The pressure made her light-headed. The light-headedness made her reactions slow down. The slowed reactions could lead to crashing the ship, but Pearlman hadn't been a pilot in the Rubble for years for no reason. And the augmentations only made her mental calculations and reaction time more accurate, now that she had got a handle on the changes.

As Pearlman swooped out of the dive at the singular moment that would give her the most thrust, she thought she heard Reynolds, the one-time ODS1 not afraid of anything, scream in terror (or maybe excitement). But it could have been her imagination.

The slingshot effect sent the Pelican rocketing across Requiem, skimming just above the skin of the planet. As she neared Requiem's northern tundra, Pearlman slowly let up on the accelerator. After a moment, a purple dot appeared and started to grow into a Covenant ship. Pearlman swooped into the terrain as it grew hillier, eventually resolving into mountains. Pearlman wove carefully around the mountains until scanners showed that the cruiser was situated around the next mountain. Pearlman lowered her Pelican onto a fairly level stretch of mountain and cut the engines.

She climbed out of the pilot's seat and walked into the main cabin. Reynolds translated her words. "All right people. The cruiser is

floating above the valley at the base of the other side of this mountain. Our goal: get in, get Thorne, get out, all under the noses of a ton of sleeping Covenant, so mum's the word." Pearlman walked out of the bay door, Kahn, Quin, and Reynolds following.

Four SPARTANs spread out and walked through the piney forest as they crept around the side of the mountain. The snow fell gently through the needle-like leaves, coating the deep green trees with a layer of powder white and blanketing the ground. The crisp, unburdened snow muffled the heavy footsteps of the SPARTANs and their MJOLNIR armour.

The muffling allowed them to sneak up on the few Covenant standing guard over the site. Quin had snapped the neck of a Jackal Sniper as though he had some personal vendetta related to sniping against it. Kahn had stumbled upon a sleeping Grunt and simply unhooked its methane pack. Pearlman had scaled a tree to jump onto the back of an unsuspecting Jackal Major. Her weight had broken its spine, and she had stolen its Point-Defence gauntlet. Reynolds had opted for the more confrontational method of throwing a snowball at his own Grunt, who was not sleeping. The Grunt, clueless as it was, failed to understand that the snowball was just a ruse until Reynolds bashed its skull in.

At last, the group broke through the forest. Requiem's "moon" shone brightly down into the valley, illuminating a well fortified Covenant base, and, far more immediately, a squad of Jackals. Reynolds, who was closest, darted out from behind his tree and proceeded to knife it in the back. Unfortunately, the strangled scream it gave alerted the other Jackals, who whipped around, guns pointing.

Without thinking, Pearlman drew her DMR and fired twice. Once into the unshielded hand and once into the head as the Jackal flinched back. The noise echoed around the valley, but gave the Jackals pause. Reynolds used the moment to scoop up a pile of snow. He threw it as he ran. The flurries momentarily obscured the Jackals' vision, and Reynolds took the opportunity to run up to the group. His hand closed over the nearest Jackal's and he twisted. A sharp crunch indicated a broken wrist, and, after a moment of fumbling, the Jackal's needler appeared in Reynolds's hand.

He pulled the trigger, and a swarm of angry hornets flew out the mouth. The last two Jackals tried to roll away, but the purple bees simply adjusted and buried themselves into the Jackals. Quivering and humming, the needles were still a moment. Then they detonated, burning the Jackals to death. The explosion threw one of the avian beasts down the mountain, where it landed, broken. Dark purple blood contrasted sharply with the crystalline snow in the moonlight.

Four SPARTANs peered down at the dead body. They also noticed activity at the base of the mountain.

Kahn said what they were all thinking. "Well, it couldn't be helped."

Pearlman just groaned and Reynolds said, "Suddenly, though, our mission is far more difficult. It's not like we can just make the mountain fall and crush the base."

Everyone was silent for a moment, but Pearlman could swear she saw a

glint in Kahn's eye through his Solar visor and red E.O.D. helmet. Sure enough, a moment later, Kahn spoke. "Or maybe we can. Did you know that breaking the sound barrier in the mountains can cause avalanches?"

Pearlman shrugged, even though she suspected that her motion was lost in her purple and white armour. "Well, I guess it makes sense, although I've never really thought about it."

"Well, that's probably because you've never been skiing. I went on a vacation to Switzerland when I was thirteen. It's an experience I won't ever forget, but the important part is that the skiing lodge I visited shot bullets into the mountains daily to cause small, controlled avalanches. This prevented uncontrolled ones from killing people."

Reynolds, who had been signing to Quin, cut in. "Quin says that he likes the plan. Just tell him when to shoot his rifle. His one problem is how we'll survive the avalanche."

Pearlman snorted in a very unladylike manner. "Oh good. Someone poked a hole in his ludicrous plan." She smirked behind her helmet, at least until she saw Kahn's head tilted as though he was looking at her arm. She followed his gaze and saw that he was looking specifically at the Point-Defence Gauntlet she was wearing. "Oh no. Whatever you're thinking, no."

Kahn looked up before replying. "And why not? There are three other Jackal energy shields lying around, and the energy projectors emit really slippery barriers. We all just stand on one and ski down. Or sit on it, if you're chicken."

Pearlman could see Reynolds scavenging around the Jackal bodies as though the matter were settled. Even though he was quite a bit more reserved than most former ODSTs, Pearlman just knew that the crazy in him (The same crazy that made it okay to descend from shit-ass insane heights with only a layer of ceramic and metal protecting you. Goodness knew that the ocean drop had only been tolerable because she was going to land in the water) loved the idea of sledding (who was she kidding? Of course Reynolds would stand) down an uncharted mountain as fast as he could to outrun an avalanche. She did have to admit that the idea was very SPARTAN, though.

So she simply muttered, "Boys," (even though Brady would probably have approved of Kahn's plan) and unhooked the Point-Defence gauntlet from around her arm. She bent down and snapped it around her left foot. She looked up to see Quin with his sniper rifle trained on something in the distance. At a signal from Reynolds, he fired.

Even as Quin's gun began to buck, the four SPARTANS leapt into the air. Pearlman tapped the "on" button with her right foot and heard the familiar sound as the shield activated. She landed and felt her weight shift unexpectedly. The slippery energy field didn't have her ability to combat gravity and Pearlman started flying down the mountain. After a moment, she got the hang of leaning forward, throwing her weight into the slope to both increase her speed and remain balanced.

Pearlman heard a rumble and glanced back for just a moment. A wave of white thundered down the mountain, closing fast. Pearlman glanced



left and saw Kahn in a steeper stretch. He bobbed and weaved around the trees in the rift by throwing his weight left and right. He soon swooped ahead, outrunning the avalanche.

A spray of snow slammed Pearlman's helmet. She wiped her visor off in time to see Reynolds using his free foot to slow down, allowing Pearlman to catch up to him. He shouted, "We're outrunning an avalanche. Commit to the mountain; weave back and forth a bit, throwing your weight. You'll go faster." With that, he lifted his foot out of the snow, and the spray it was generating ceased. Pearlman watched as he leant left and cut a diagonal path down the mountain before curving around the other way, building up momentum as he shifted his weight.

Pearlman copied him, taking sharper, more daring curves in order to catch up. She caught up to him, and, in a moment of giddiness as she hit a mogul and went flying, she shouted, "See you at the bottom!"

The jump was much too short. Pearlman loved the feeling of flying without a plane. She had thought that three dimensions was enough, but three dimensions without being in a metal box was even better. So Pearlman hit another bump and went sailing.

A loud crack echoed below Pearlman, and she saw Quin's telltale ice-blue Deadeye armour. He seemed utterly at ease, cruising down the mountain with long, gentle curves. If he noticed the avalanche, he didn't show any signs of it. Instead, he simply held his sniper rifle up to his Midnight visor and pulled the trigger again. The barrel bucked and Quin leaned into both the shot and the slope, acceleration ever so slightly.

Pearlman couldn't see what happened next because she sailed over Quin's head. She landed and threw out her arms for stability. A moment later, Pearlman was cruising down the slope. She tried to copy Quin's stance on the energy shield and drew her DMR. Pearlman raised it to her eye and sighted down the scope, but the jerking as she skied down the slope was too much.

Pearlman had no idea how Quin could use a Sniper Rifle like that, but it didn't really matter. What did matter was the objective, which was closing fast. Pearlman glanced ahead and saw Kahn slide into the base. He tapped the off button and ran into a building. Pearlman heard shots, but she could also see a fair number of Covenant simply running. Grunts, Jackals, Elites, they all wanted to escape the avalanche, leaving the base fairly clear. Only the most zealous of the group must have stayed.

Pearlman slid into the base and immediately felt her shields begin to drain. An Elite Ranger stood, pumping plasma into her with a storm rifle. Pearlman whipped out her DMR and fired, conscious that she had only a minute or two to get out of the way of the avalanche. She guessed that the Ranger wouldn't have to worry about that, being able to fly.

Her bullet fizzled against the Elite's shields, and she fired again, jumping and deactivating the Jackal energy shield that she had been using. Her second DMR bullet hit well before she was through with her jump, but before she could fire another shot, the Elite collapsed, a depleted uranium sniper round embedded in its skull. Quin came

sailing in and crashed into the wall. He fell. A moment later, he got up and yanked the Point-Defence hauntlet off of his foot and threw it to the side. Reynolds slid in and expertly turned the shield off, allowing him to simply step off his "snowboard". He ran up to Quin and signed something. Quin replied right as Kahn ran through one of the doors leading to other parts of the base.

"Come on! I just killed the Elite guarding the gravity lift. We may have outrun the avalanche, but it is closing fast. Look!" A quick glance showed the white snowy breakers closing. Kahn ran off and Pearlman followed him. He stopped at a translucent purplish beam and gesticulated as though he were an eighteenth century butler. "Ladies first." Pearlman just sighed and stepped into the beam. She floated up, seemingly weightless and looked down to see Kahn, Quin, and Reynolds enter the grav-lift below her. A moment later, snow rushed down the mountain and covered the purple buildings. The dots in the distance that represented the fleeing Storm Covenant were soon covered in a layer of what appeared to be pristine new-fallen snow.

Pearlman then shifted her vision up, looking into the hold of the ship. She could see burnished purple metal gleaming as the moonlight reflected off of the snow. The sky around the hole into the hangar was obscured by the ship, whose underside was covered in reflective purple hexagons.

Pearlman felt the gravity lift accelerate and spit her out into the ship's hold. She move out of the way, allowing Kahn, Quin, and Reynolds to land. As soon as Reynold's boots touched the floor, the grav lift shut down and the hole spiraled shut like the lens on a camera. The doors all slammed shut. Kahn raced over to one of the consoles embedded into the side of the wall and began tapping furiously.

A moment later, and he looked up. "It's no good. Whoever ordered this did it well."

"Ordered what?"

Kahn gestured towards the panel. "See for yourself, Reynolds. The most I could pull out of it was the fact that this was planned."

"What was planned?"

"Locking us in. And . . . dispensing nerve gas. That was pretty much all that I could pull off of this computer. It's smashed, but not in the way you'd think. That, I could fix. But this, the Covenant appear to have ripped out the wiring that connects these things to the actual components, and unless I can get to the wires, we're stuck."

Pearlman asked a question. "So it was a trap?"

"Appears so. And the nerve gas that is currently being dispensed is bufotoxin. Just be glad that they aren't using botulinum toxin. They just want to capture us, probably for ransom or something."

Reynolds cut in. "And how can you tell that?"

"Well, bufotoxin is an incredibly potent hallucinogen. I've already sealed my suit, but that only has two hours of air. The Covenant knows this, I bet, so it may just be easier to pass out and enjoy the hallucinations until the Covenant come to pick us up and put us in some sort of holding cell as opposed to using the entire ship to trap a SPARTAN fireteam."

Pearlman nodded. "Well, that makes sense, but what is that other toxin you mentioned?"

"Botulinum toxin is an incredibly poisonous neurotoxin. A single gram of it can kill a million people if it were evenly dispersed and inhaled. It works by disrupting the axons of neurons, causing complete paralysis. Indeed, the paralysis is so permanent that people back in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries used it under the name 'Botox' to paralyse the skin and avoid wrinkles. Why they would want to inject themselves with even minute quantities of something so toxic, I don't know."

Pretty much as soon as Kahn finished his explanation, Pearlman began to feel the effects of the bufotoxin. It felt like she had stepped into a DalÃ-. She held up her hands, and she could see her fingers melting right out of her armour, but all she felt was a quiet, orange feeling. And Pearlman found that she didn't give a lamppost.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>AN: Remember, tank beats everything (except reviews).\*\*

\*\*Yes, parts of this chapter were simply for the awesome effect (I know full well that you cannot outski an avalanche [unless Forerunner snow is special or Requiem's gravity is far less than Earth's]), and, full disclosure here, biathlon was most definitely the source of Quin's sniping skiing.\*\*

## 15. Silent as a Tomb

\*\*A/N: I wanted to put in a little bit about the Blades, My Wunderwaffle iz missin's mercenary team, but I figured that that would just be a bit of an insult to the Blades for the position I had planned, so this is just a shout-out to My Wunderwaffle iz missin. I want to thank him or her (No, I don't know his or her sex, so I make up my own theories. I like my current theory that My Wunderwaffle iz missin is actually a 29 year old female SPARTAN from 2557 that time traveled back to 2013 to warn us of what will come to pass.) for giving me encouragement and just being there (or, you know, accessable online) while writing this story. Thank you My Wunderwaffle iz missin, and please enjoy, everybody.\*\*

\*\*Disclaimer: I am in no way affiliated with Microsoft, Bungie, or 343 Industries. This is for my enjoyment and, hopefully, the enjoyment of others. I do not receive a profit.\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>Silent as a Tomb<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Quin woke up with a nasty headache. At first, he thought he was drunk. The memories he could find would certainly account for it, but his armour wouldn't. Quin shook his head to try and clear the fog. Some of it effused out his ears, and more memories came to light. Not just watching as his head ballooned into a pin and his toes curled purple and his ears began to whisper the secrets of the people of Geldenland.<p>

Now he remembered the snow and the ship and the bufotoxin. Reynolds had managed to sign that much before his hands had turned into jellyfish.

Quin glanced around and realised that he didn't recognise the surroundings. Three stark metal walls, a simple floor and high ceiling, and an energy field stretching across the entire open wall. He tentatively rose from the place he lay and stood up, stretching his arms above his head. He chinned his green light to see if it gave a response. A moment later, two greens appeared. Quin tried to remember the assignations of the lights. Brady's was out, and so was Pearlman's. Quin guessed that Pearlman's small size and petite form (for a SPARTAN) was making recovery harder for her.

Bored, Quin walked up to the energy field and peered out of it. He could make out several cells probably very similar to his own. Purely by luck, he could make out two shadowy figures standing near their own force field doors as close to the wall as they could. Quin hoped one of them was Reynolds, so he slammed his fist on the energy door, praying that it would make a sound.

It must have worked, because the figures turned and stepped right next to the fields, allowing Quin to make out Reynolds's black Gungnir armour and Kahn's red E.O.D. armour through the double layering of energy. He signed, /What's going on?\ to Reynolds.

The response was quick. /The Covenant used a decoy ship and a hallucinogen called bufotoxin to capture us, remember?\

/Yes, my memories have come back since I woke up, but I mean, where are we?\

/Captured, probably being held in a Forerunner storage facility of some sort. Kahn thinks it isn't really a prison because he believes that he can override these doors from the inside.\

/Really? How?\

/Once we're all up, he's going to trigger a localised electromagnetic pulse, hopefully shutting down the energy doors. We'll just have to stand back so that the EMP doesn't knock our suits out.\

/How is he going to make an EMP? They stole my weapons. I should just be glad this armour doesn't come off, or I bet they would have pilfered that, too. Heck, why haven't they just killed us?"\

/Don't know why they aren't killing captured fireteams, but as to the EMP, well, Kahn has all sorts of gadgets stored in the nooks of his armour. Everything from a sonic screwdriver to a neuralyzer. They didn't strip-search him, so he has a microdot with limited EMP capability attached to the underside of his boot.

/The one problem is that the EPM may trigger an alarm, so he won't trigger it until everyone is ready to go.\

/How will you know when Pearlman wakes up?\

/Although this base blocks long-range radio, we have been firing off our green every few minutes, hoping thar you and Pearlman will respond. And now that you are-\ Reynolds was interrupted by a green light. Quin beeped his and was relieved to see a total of four green lights a moment later. After a moment, they winked out and Reynolds signed, /Back away. Firing EMP.\ Reynolds retreated and Quin hastened to do the same.

A moment later, Quin felt the hairs on his body raise as the remnants of the electromagnetic pulse washed over him. Although his helmet screen flickered for a moment, Quin's suit was far better off than the door. The bluish field began oscillating back and forth before abruptly shutting down. The lights flickered out as the Forerunner equivalent to a microchip had all of its circuits scrambled and fused. Quin flicked on his helmet lights and stepped cautiously out of the cell into a narrow hallway. Glancing around, he saw that five of the cells had been deactivated by the pulse. His own and the one next to it on the left, as well as Kahn's and the ones on both sides. One was empty, but Kahn and Reynolds emerged from theirs and the one next to Quin revealed a tired looking Pearlman. Although her armour was put on properly, her slouched posture suggested that she was wearing the armour under protest.

No one needed to say what came next. Kahn opened the entire cell block and all five piled into the cell closest to the door. A moment later, the doors leading out of the cell block slid open, admitting a group of Grunts that must have been sent to check on the power failure. Pearlman held up three fingers as the Grunts passed. She lowered them one by one by one. On the signal, the four jumped out of their hidey-hole and killed the Grunts. Quin's target had enough time to turn around before he picked it up as used it as a shield. One of the other Grunts pumped it full of plasma before Kahn kicked the other Grunt's face in and stole its plasma pistol. Quin took the needler out of his shield's hands and aimed at one of the last Grunts. He pulled the trigger and watched as the Grunt detonated.

Quin scavenged munitions while Kahn started toying with the methane packs and a plasma pistol. Reynolds explained. /We have no clue what's behind the door. In Kahn's words, 'Take methane, add plasma, you get a bomb.'\

A minute later, Kahn had rigged things so that the pistol would begin to overcharge when he pulled a string. Attached as it was to a methane tank, the plasma would ignite the methane. The primary detonation would send the other attached methane packs flying, and, a moment later, they too would explode, having been ignited by the first explosion.

Quin hit the door controls and Kahn shoved his homemade bomb out the door. Quin closed the door with another press of the controls. Kahn waited a moment, probably for the sounds of investigation, and then yanked the string he held through the closed door. Reynolds listened for a moment before signing, /Now.\ Quin let the doors open all the

way this time.

Four SPARTANs emerged on a war zone. Kahn's IED had done its job well. The floor in front of the door was blackened, as were the walls of the wider hallway. There were no recognisable bodies in the immediate vicinity, but an Elite Zealot lay collapsed a ways down the hall. There was a black mark about a metre away where one of the packs had sailed down the hall.

Reynolds walked up to the collapsed Elite and almost lazily flipped his knife out. He paused a moment and Quin could tell he said something. Then he knelt and drove the knife into the Elite's left eye. Reynolds took the Elite's storm rifle and tossed his plasma pistol to Pearlman, who caught it deftly with her free hand.

The group moved carefully down the hall, a single unit sweeping through the remnants of Forerunner civilisation. The short hall soon opened into a hexagonal room with a smaller honeycomb cell in the centre. Pearlman crept to the door that led to the secondary room and stationed herself on one side of the door. Kahn joined her on the other side while Reynolds and Quin snuck to the edges of the inner hexagon. Pearlman counted down from three with her fingers.

When she reached zero, Quin swept around his corner and encountered a pair of Jackals. One started shooting plasma at him, so he responded with needles. Unfortunately, they bounced off of the shield, so he changed tactics. Quin took a running leap and rushed into the first Jackal. His momentum bowled the Jackal over and his weight crushed it.

As Quin turned to the second Jackal, he saw that it had brought an Elite . . . and an overcharged plasma pistol. Before Quin could react, his shields were gone and the Elite had leveled a carbine at him. He ducked to avoid getting headshot while pulling the trigger of his needler. He didn't even get a chance to aim, just to shoot. Luckily for him, the needles still found their targets. Twenty-two angry needles began to veer toward the Covenant. Some split off to chase the Jackal while the others flew at the Elite.

The Jackal was already dead, even if its body was still breathing. And although the Elite had jumped to the side at the last moment and shot a further three bolts from its carbine, hungry needles had still embedded themselves in its flesh. Quin groaned as biofoam sealed his chest and upper arm where the carbine had punctured. The Jackal and Elite detonated and Quin's shields started to recharge.

Quin walked over to the Elite and picked up his carbine. The longer barrel and shoulder stock felt comfortable in his arm, even if it was an alien weapon. He turned the corner and encountered a trio of Grunts. Quin aimed and squeezed the trigger. It only took three shots to down the group.

Quin swept around the last corner in time to see Reynolds executing an Elite. He shoved the storm rifle into its mouth and pulled the trigger. Plasma burst out of the back of the Elite's skull, followed by bits of brain. The pair turned to where the door should be. A blank wall greeted them.

Pearlman stepped around the corner. A minute later, Reynolds signed, /Pearlman says there's a lift in the centre. We go back around and

ride it up to the surface. Call a bird and escape.\ Quin nodded and the three SPARTANs dashed around to the door to the central room. A pair of Elites and a clutch of Grunts lay dead. Kahn stood in the middle and motioned the others over. Once they were all gathered on the lift, Kahn pushed the hard light button and the lift rocketed skyward.

When the lift secured itself into the floor, four SPARTANs spread out into the small antechamber. Three walls and a roof covered the lift area, but the fourth wall was open and led into a jungle. The four walked to the jungle and Quin noticed Pearlman open a comm. link.

The foliage was thick, so Quin soon lost all sense of direction. Pearlman led the group on as straight as she could, clearly heading for an objective some ways away. As the SPARTANs walked, ghosts constantly popped up on their radars because of the movement of the jungle. But the jungle was empty of actual enemies.

Pearlman stepped into a small clearing. It was too small to admit a Pelican, but six Ghosts were parked there. Pearlman grinned and climbed into one. Reynolds explained. /The foliage is too thick for a rescue, so we'll use these to get to thinner trees, but be ready. Data suggests that that area is filled with Covenant. Quin hopped onto another Ghost, as did Kahn and Reynolds. Pearlman led the way, rocketing into the forest. Kahn gunned his own engine and Quin followed behind him. Reynolds acted as rear guard.

Quin wove through the trees right on Kahn's heels. He, in turn, followed Pearlman, who dashed through the jungle with reckless abandon, nearly clipping trees and breaking right through ancient swathes of moss. The forest periodically darkened before betting lighter and darkening again as though the forest couldn't make up its mind as to whether it was going to thin or get thicker. That worried Quin. At least until he caught sight of a Wraith through the trees. If such a bulky craft could get through, then Pearlman's clearing must be close.

From ahead, Quin saw as Pearlman raised her right hand and motioned. It wasn't sign language, but the meaning was still clear. Two fingers pointing left and then two fingers pointing right. Pearlman and Kahn broke off and veered left, while Quin and Reynolds flanked right.

Once the SPARTANs were in place, Reynolds opened fire. His Ghost spit plasma at the Wraith. It began to turn, aiming at him through the trees. It only managed to lob a single mortar shot before Quin, Kahn, and Pearlman opened fire distracting it.

Although the four SPARTANs individually were no more than hornets to the Wraith, as they circled, the Wraith and Elite in the turret had an almost impossible time attacking. First Quin's Ghost and then Kahn's. and eventually, the combined plasma of four Ghosts crippled the Wraith. It fired another mortar shot, this one also at Reynolds. Even as it sailed through the air toward the Ghosts that had moved into the clearing for aided mobility, the Wraith's shell gave way. The plasma ate through something of import, and the Wraith began to shake.

The Elite in the turret tried to bail, but to no avail. The Wraith

exploded in a massive fireball at the same time as its mortar impacted near Reynolds. The impact sent his Ghost flying with him still in it. Quin tracked it as it disappeared over the horizon. He reoriented his Ghost and shot back into the forest.

Even as Quin began to see signs of conflict, Kahn and Pearlman caught up to him. The three snuck nearer the flashes of light before parking their Ghosts and peering out from behind trees. Reynolds was dueling a pair of Hunters. His Ghost was planted nose-down into the ground several metres away. His backdrop was a sheer cliff face with a breathtaking overlook. Dark green and foggy, the perfect example of a high altitude rainforest.

Reynolds's storm rifle flared and plasma washed over one Hunter's shield, but that was just a decoy. As the beast hunkered behind its shield, Reynolds ran up to it and jumped, planting one foot on the shield. He turned in midair and pulled the trigger. This time, the plasma burned through the orange worms that made up the Hunter. Quin, Pearlman, and Kahn added their own shots, and Kahn hurled a plasma grenade square onto the Hunter's back. That much combined fire served only to enrage the Hunter. It roared and waved its shield around - a deadly mistake. Reynolds finished the job by taking a step forward and slamming the Hunter's neck with the butt of his gun. The Hunter collapsed.

The other Hunter had been trying to aim at Reynolds but couldn't fire without the risk of hitting its bond mate. But with the collapse of its bond partner, the Hunter roared and charged Reynolds with an unprecedented speed.

Reynolds had only the time to turn and sign a very quick, /Feet first,\ before the Hunter crashed into him. Even with his Deadeye armour zoomed in, Quin couldn't tell exactly what happened next. But somehow, the Hunter was flying over the cliff with Reynolds on its back, a grenade in hand.

Quin ran over to the edge and peered down. The cliff was long and very steep. He couldn't see any hand holds, or what he was actually looking for. A set of black Gungnir armour. Quin beeped his green.

Nothing.

Quin beeped it a moment later, but only Kahn and Pearlman responded. He turned swiftly to look at Pearlman and Kahn their heads were together, but Quin had no clue what they were talking about. His last link with sound had been cut off.

Quin slashed one hand into the air for emphasis and shouted, "No! We hold here." Reynolds was alive. He had to be. So when he came climbing over the cliff he would need his teammates waiting where they had left him.

It certainly seemed as though Kahn and Pearlman agreed with Quin's statement, but he couldn't hear a response to the positive, either. He couldn't hear any response. He couldn't hear at all.

So he stared. Quin stared through his Midnight visor and through Pearlman's Sunspot visor. He held her look for one minute . . . two. Finally, she nodded and opened a channel with the Pelican that would



rescue them. When she was done talking, Pearlman held up seven fingers.

Seven minutes. Reynolds could climb the cliff within the time frame, right? So Quin stationed himself against a tree, carbine ready.

It was a big jungle, but the smoke and flames of the burning Ghost certainly caught the attention of several Covenant. Grunts and Jackals would wander in, thinking that an accident had happened. They were easy pickings, and Quin only ever used one carbine shot to take them down. The Elites that came to investigate were a bit more trouble, and Pearlman's dual Plasma Pistols were instrumental in killing the Elites before they could call for backup.

Those seven minutes stretched on forever, with Quin constantly looking over his shoulder for Reynolds. Eventually, he gave up and fell into his routine of firing with complete concentration. So immersed in the world of the scope was he, it took Pearlman shaking his shoulder to sign to him that the Pelican was there. Quin turned reluctantly and boarded the dropship. It just . . . felt wrong to leave without Reynolds. He had understood leaving without Brady. The Flood had to be stopped, but to leave without Reynolds, to leave in absolute silence, that was far worse.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>AN: Confession time. I actually had this finished a while back, but wanted to post it today so that I could say, "May the Fourth be with you." I love Star Wars day, but, like Lord of the Rings, it's one of those sacred institutions I don't want to touch. Yes, like Halo, they have whole universes from which I could create completely new characters, but unlike Halo, the plot holes aren't big enough to try to fill in. There isn't an equivalent to Spartan Ops.\*\*

## 16. Yet Still, You Fail

\*\*A/N: Enjoy!\*\*

\*\*Disclaimer: I am in no way affiliated with Microsoft, Bungie, or 343 Industries. This is for my enjoyment and, hopefully, the enjoyment of others. I do not receive a profit.\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>Yet Still, You Fail<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Arianna sat across from Cara. Cara's helmet was off and resting beside her. Normally, Arianna would be able to see Cara's pretty features. But not now. Cara was currently stuffing her plump lips with homemade ice cream and her green eyes were red from crying.<p>

Arianna had grown close to Cara during her time aboard the Infinity, so it had been decided that she would be the one to tell Cara of Marcus's probable death. The ice cream, though, she had nothing to do with.

The crying was expected, so Raj had had the idea to make ice cream, claiming that ice cream was what got his mother out of her own depressive states. The only problem was that military ships didn't stock ice cream. So Raj had snuck into the mess the sleep cycle before and stolen cream, rock salt, and the other essentials. How he had found those things amongst the MREs, Arianna would never know. Maybe some raw ingredients were stocked for special occasions.

Although Arianna had not initially approved of his plan, Raj had snuck out anyway. So she had grudgingly helped him toss the cream around in a bag to make the ice cream. She would never, ever tell Raj, but it had been fun to avoid waking Edward (who was dealing with his own sadness by sleeping it off) while preparing the ice cream.

This "morning", when she'd left to talk to Cara, Arianna left half the ice cream for Edward with a short note. She had taken the other half and ambushed Cara as she left the mess, taken her inside and sat her down. Then Arianna had given Cara the news and ice cream.

When at last the ice cream was gone, Cara looked up. Then she did a double take. Arianna whipped her head around and saw Raj jumping over a table in full MJOLNIR armour. His Solar visor was staring right at her, trying to tell the girls something.

Arianna stood up and picked up her own Air Assault helmet. As Raj slid to a stop next to the girls, Arianna asked, "What?"

His response was terse. "Halsey's been taken. By Prometheans."

Pearlman jammed the helmet over her small head. "Do I want to know how?"

"The Artifact is acting as an anchor to teleport the Knights in. Halsey was the only one that actually understood that shit, and she's gone. For now, we guard the ship. Niven, you up to helping us?"

Niven stood up and put on her Oceanic helmet. "Always. Where's Quin?"

A shot rang out and both Niven and Pearlman spun to see what it was. A Knight was dissolving a table away, and a figure in ice-blue and yellow Deadeye armour stood in one of the doorways. "Right there." The three dashed to join Quin.

The four encountered a group of Crawlers guarding the hall. As quick a fix as they were, the fight still reminded Niven and Pearlman that fists didn't generally replace weapons. So when the hallway presented an opportunity, Niven directed the group toward the armoury, claiming, "These boltshots won't hold up against Knights," and signing it to Quin.

The other three nodded their assent, and the SPARTANs sprinted around the corner. . . only to be blocked by a plasma turret. Kahn's cry of, "How in hell are they set up?" was nearly drowned out by the explosion of a fuel rod cannon as it flew into a wall not two metres

away. The four scattered, rolling away.

Pearlman came up with her Boltshot ready. She pulled the trigger and an unlucky Grunt's brains were painted on the bulkhead. She crossed over to the body and grabbed the plasma pistol. It felt right in her hand, far better than the angular boltshot it was based on.

However, the Boltshot's hard light ammunition did allow for headshots, something she took advantage of when a trio of Jackals rounded the next corner. Six shots, three at the hands for the recoil, and three at the heads for the kill, was far more efficient than the plasma pistol. So she kept both guns.

Pearlman swung around another corner, both guns pointing. Kahn and Quin aimed back. The three moved up the corridor, looking for Niven and the gunner. Together, the three began to swim through the waves of Covenant. Quin executed an Elite. Pearlman overloaded a Jackal's shield and shot it before turning around to pistol whip a not-so-sneaky Grunt. Kahn drilled a clip of bullets into a Watcher as it flew over the divider.

But Niven was nowhere to be found. What could be found was an Elite in golden armour with a fuel rod cannon. But explosives were no match for three SPARTANs. Pearlman ducked behind cover and began overloading her plasma pistol while Kahn shot bursts at the Elite to distract it. A moment later, Pearlman popped up, let her gun achieve a lock, and destroyed the Elite's shields. As soon as they were down, Quin pumped one round into the Elite's skull. The hollow-point bullet tore a ragged hole in the Elite's head. It quickly ballooned to the size of a watermelon, and the Elite's head almost literally exploded. Kahn claimed the cannon as his own.

And then the turret found them. It was being carried by Niven. Pearlman glanced behind Niven to see a swath of dead Grunts and even an Elite laying next to the turret's tripod. Niven set her gun down to sign what she spoke. "You know, I'm not so sure we need to get to the armoury. Plus, I was contacted by Palmer. She believes that Elite terrorist Yet 'Daumo is leading this assault. He wears golden Ranger armour with the Didact's Hand stamped to his chest.

"I've been contacted by Palmer. Apparently, I'm the closest to his supposed location, so I'm subcontracting you guys to help me. Remember, 'Daumo is quite the leader. ONI wants him alive for interrogation." With that, she turned, picked up the turret, and lumbered off. The other three caught up to her quickly, however.

Niven was following some objective the rest couldn't see. The only times she paused were the brief engagements with Crawlers and Grunts. The lack of actual resistance confused Pearlman until she caught sight of several Elites in golden armour. Several were dragging box-like objects, but one stood in the middle, directing it all. The boxes were nearly invisible, and Pearlman couldn't make out what they were.

And the leader was far more interesting. His armour was different, completely vacuum sealed. It had a large white hand painted in the middle. Yet 'Daumo. Unfortunately, MJOLNIR armour wasn't exactly known for stealth, and Quin couldn't just shoot without warning 'Daumo of their approach of killing him. So when he noticed the

SPARTANs, he roared and made a motion. The small army of incredibly zealous Grunts waving plasma grenades that came around a corner bespoke the importance of whatever the boxes were.

Niven stepped forward and pulled the trigger on her turret. Plasma rained upon the cannon fodder, and the detonation of grenades also helped to thin the ranks. But when the turret's chamber clicked empty, there were still three Grunts bearing down. Pearlman raised her guns and fired, as did Kahn. The Grunts fell, but 'Daumo was nowhere to be seen.

Niven signed and said, "I bet he is headed for his entry point - a hole he blasted in the hull. Quin and Kahn, get there before he does. Fastest way is back and down a level. Pearlman, come with me. We're chasing the bastard." She dropped her turret and sprinted. Pearlman had no choice but to follow her.

Niven followed the objective marker in her helmet, although Pearlman had no clue as to whether or not it was accurate. The signs of quick, descisive battles along the pathway seemed to say so. Marines lay in pools of thier own blood, energy sword burns apparent on the bodies. Niven grabbed the DMR from one of the bodies and shook the blood off of it.

Another minute of sprinting led Pearlman and Niven down a deck. They had been running through halls when they caught sight of Yet fleeing. Following in his footsteps, the pair had leapt over a hastily made barricade at the top of the stairs.

They had gone crashing down, ending up in a tangled set of limbs. The sound made 'Daumo turn. He raised his sword, and a pair of Knights teleported in. Pearlman felt her shields take a beating when the Commander shot its scattershot at her. Pearlman motioned to the Knight and Niven went to work helping her.

Pearlman fired a few shots from the boltshot while holding the trigger of her plasma pistol. Niven drove shots into it, keeping the Knight far enough away that its scattershot was ineffective. It decided this and teleported. Pearlman noticed its pose and guessed. She spun around, staring at her radar and praying that she was right.

Sadly, the Knight did not simply go into hiding. It warped right next to Pearlman. She fired blindly, but missing at point plank was nigh on impossible. The Knight roared, jumping back. But even though it was safe from her fists, the Knight couldn't dodge Pearlman's overloaded boltshot to its unshielded face.

The other Knight issued a Watcher, childlike. The Watcher, however, did not seem interested in reviving its comrade. Just summoning more Crawlers. Pearlman hastily shot the group and took the boltshot ammunition for herself. She looked up in time to see Niven's last bullet shatter the Watcher.

The two ganged up on the last Knight. Pearlman spent her plasma pistol stripping the Knight Lancer of its hard light shields. Niven drove a bullet into the Knight as it opened its face to roar. The Knight dissolved and scattered like feathers on the wind.

The two went off in pursuit of Yet 'Daumo. An Elite and a pair of

Jackals ran up the corridor, and Niven grinned. "He's getting close to his escape, but he's also getting desperate. Niven slowed her pace, stepping as she shot the Elite. It jumped around, dodging some shots, but when Pearlman closed with an overloaded boltshot, the Elite stopped. A few stray needles shattered in Pearlman's armour as Niven nodded her thanks and squeezed off two shots. The Jackal's natural instinct to recoil made her second shot a kill.

Pearlman dashed to the dead Jackal and grabbed its needler. She unloaded the entire clip at the last Jackal, which responded with an overcharge that ate Pearlman's shields. Unfortunately for the Jackal, needler supercombines were far more dangerous than overcharged plasma pistol shots. Pearlman traded her newly acquired beedler for the plasma pistol.

Niven began to step through a small doorway, but stopped Pearlman. "No. I'm just getting a better vantage point. Follow the main hall, turn left at the bulkhead. Yet 'Daumo needs to be captured. Pearlman nodded and ran around the corner.

The sight that greeted her was that of a gaping hole in the hull. It was large enough to make Quin and Kahn, who stood near it, seem tiny. An Elite in golden Ranger armour was also dwarfed by the hole. With no backup to summon, the Elite was slowly backing away from the pair of SPARTANS. Pearlman quickly darted to the Elite, cutting off his last escape route.

At last, 'Daumo was surrounded. Niven stepped out onto a catwalk above, DMR trained. Quin blocked the hole in the hull, sniper rifle leveled. Kahn and his battle rifle were opposite Pearlman and her plasma pistol, blocking the hallways. Pearlman aimed her words at Yet 'Daumo. "You're surrounded. Why do you still fight? Surrender, and you will be spared."

'Daumo stood, breathing heavily, energy sword in hand. He was silent long enough that Pearlman began to doubt that he understood English. At last, in a deep, very guttural English, "Honour. I know your race knew what that was, once. In the words of your Horatius,

\_ 'To every man upon this earth,  
>Death cometh soon or late.<br>And how can man die better  
>Than facing fearful odds,<br>For the ashes of his fathers  
>And the temples of his gods?'<em>"

Yet 'Daumo was silent just a moment and Pearlman suddenly knew what was going to happen, but it didn't matter. His words were lethargic, and her gun was too slow. Even as she brought her pistol to bear, Yet 'Daumo had roared and charged Quin. Quin, who couldn't hear, who couldn't know what the Elite had said, who was blocking Yet's path to the freedom of space.

Quin dodged the energy sword at the last second, but was too slow to dodge the two tonnes of Elite that crashed into him. Decompression had already happened, but when Quin was knocked off his feet, the pair still spun into the blackness of the void. The only way to see them was the whirling mass that obscured the stars.

Kahn and Pearlman ran to the edge and Niven hopped off the catwalk. Pearlman was preparing to jump, screw the Pelican she would have normally taken. Niven's hand on her shoulder stopped her. Pearlman

turned to look into the Engineer visor and bright blue Oceanic helmet. A barely perceptible shake. "I'll go. I'm trained to operate solo, and if I find him, I can talk to him. For now, we're both MIA."

Kahn nodded approvingly and SPARTAN Niven sailed out the hole before Pearlman had an opportunity to come up with a response

\* \* \*

><p><strong>AN: So, how have the 'death' scenes been, so far? And Kahn doesn't have the Fuel Rod Cannon because he and Quin ran into a pair of Hunters.\*\*

\*\*Oh, and I am entering a fiction writing competition, so I might be off for a while. Mind, the cap is 2,000 words, so I shan't be off for that long (my average chapter is probably 3,000 words).\*\*

\*\*OBLIVION was a great movie. That's where I learned about the Horatius quote. Yes, the sex scene at the beginning was just gratuitous and irrelevant, but the questions the movie posed were excellent. Beautiful and sad, with just enough hope to keep going.\*\*

## 17. Exodus

\*\*A/N: I'm back. And well aware that Yet 'Daumo's quotation of Horatius was actually something Macaulay said. However, I cannot imagine an Elite knowing that. So yeah . . . enjoy.\*\*

\*\*Disclaimer: I am in no way affiliated with Microsoft, Bungie, or 343 Industries. This is for my enjoyment and, hopefully, the enjoyment of others. I do not receive a profit.\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>Exodus<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Raj couldn't help it. He let out another scream of complete and utter frustration, ignoring the way that Arianna rocked the Pelican in response. The worries that had always bubbled below the surface, held in only by his demeanor, were escaping. War had never seemed so awful. They were SPARTANs, not mere soldiers. They were supposed to ride ahead, slaughtering their foes. So why had three of them died already?<p>

Raj tried not to any more morbid thoughts drift past, because he was a SPARTAN. Marines could be worried about dying (especially against the Flood), but SPARTANs were unkillable. After all, Juliette and Marcus and Edward were only missing, right?

But Raj couldn't stop wondering who would be next.

So Kahn was glad to have something else to think about when Stephenson came onto his helmet comm to announce, "This op is live. Intel gathered from an area known as Control suggests that Halsey may be here, but be quick. Fireteams Crimson and Majestic are disabling

"slipspace locks" that are keeping the Infinity trapped around Requiem . . . which is now heading into its sun. Don't be here when that happens.

"Your only official goal is to study the place, but look for Halsey and find her if you can. O.N.I. wants her dead, but just bring her back. Let Lasky sort the mess out. Good luck."

Kahn grabbed a battle rifle and magnum, readying himself for when Pearlman touched down at their destination. Known only as Singularity, its appearance had been made clear to Roland only when Requiem's death knell began. And so, as a fireteam damned by circumstance but uplifted by achievement, the remnants of Nebula had been selected to investigate, and more importantly, look for Halsey.

As the Pelican alighted on a small bluff, Kahn flicked on his Promethean Vision to ensure that it was working. With it, he saw Pearlman shuffling around in the cockpit as she got her own weaponry ready for the operation. Kahn turned his Promethean Vision off and waited by the ramp.

Once Pearlman joined Kahn, he hit the door controls and the ramp descended. The pair stepped off and carefully snuck down the bluff, eyes flashing behind helmets. But Kahn and Pearlman were far enough away that they went undetected.

The area around the rise was very lightly treed, and the tall, yellow grass suggested a veldt. Kahn tried to emulate Pearlman's soft footsteps through the grass, but his own steps felt far too loud in order to run infiltration. Not for the first time, he wished Brady would just fade out of her Active Camo and come to help. But it never happened.

Kahn tried to shrug off the idle dreams and darted up to right behind Pearlman. The grass began to grow a little sparser and Kahn passed close to one of the few trees in his view. It was tall, graceful, with light brown bark. Yellow-green leaves adorned the top of the tree and spread out in a wind-blown disc with a crest on top. It reminded Kahn of a sand dune or an ocean wave coming to crash down on him.

Kahn shook off the foreboding and continued toward Singularity, following Pearlman. The grass got thinner and sparser until the SPARTANs were walking on dirt. But that was a short-lived environ. A light blue energy field descended from a dome in the sky, terminating at the edge of the dirt, where it was replaced by Forerunner metal. Pearlman's boots rang as she stepped onto the floor, but the energy field did nothing to hamper her progress. Kahn stepped into the energy projection after her. Suddenly, a bolt of green plasma flew at Pearlman from the side. She twitched, dropping as though shot, and the green light flew just over her purple armour, staining it a sickly green for just a moment.

They had found the enemies. Or rather, the enemies had found them. Kahn whirled around to find a pair of Hunters crouched, guns pointed. Kahn fired off a three-round burst and dove to the side. Another bolt of explosive plasma boiled the air where he had been.

And then came another explosion, this one launched from the other

side. Kahn turned warily round only to see Pearlman's magnum buck as though in slow motion. The gun jumped and a bullet casing flew. Kahn followed the bullet and saw a Grunt wielding a fuel rod gun writhe and collapse. Kahn shouldered his rifle and fired at the next Grunt in the group. Pearlman shot again and they advanced, drilling bullets in the heads of the Grunts.

Kahn reached the last Grunt with an empty chamber. So he twisted it around and stabbed it in the neck with his knife. Kahn turned around, dropping the empty magazine out of his gun. As he put another magazine into the gun, he saw one of the Hunters closing. Kahn scrambled backward, shooting bullets into the Hunter's weak knees. The three-round bursts were like bee stings - they annoyed the Hunter, but didn't really stop it. What did was Pearlman's newly acquired Fuel Rod Gun. Five green globules flew at the Hunter, slamming into it over and over again. Once the last one exploded against the Hunter's armour, the beast fell forward, dead.

Kahn nodded his thanks and bent down, scooping up his own fuel rod gun in place of his magnum. Together, the SPARTANs rained green explosives down onto the other Hunter while its own gun swiveled back and forth, clearly undecided as to which enemy to shoot. As it fell, Kahn heard Pearlman. "Come on. That was only border patrol. All the secrets are deeper in."

"Said the actress to the bishop." Pearlman just groaned, but Kahn was happy. Killing things was a great way to take his mind off of depressing thoughts. Kahn and Pearlman scavenged more ammunition for the fuel rod guns before heading to the centre.

The fuel rod guns made their job a lot easier. Kahn would use his Promethean Vision to spot targets, mark them, and then explosives would fly. However, there just weren't many enemies. A clutch of Jackals, another group of Grunts, the occasional patrolling of Elites, but that was it. Very little to shoot. Just the ruins of ancient Forerunner buildings.

But as Kahn and Pearlman climbed a set of gargantuan stairs in the epicenter of Singularity, they found out why. The steps on the outside (which had involved stealing Float Packs from a pair of Elite Rangers to climb them) formed a ring around a central depression. The sinkhole was a mass exodus. An army of the Storm Covenant was gathered around a giant ship situated in the ring. A tall spire was built into the ground near the ship. Pearlman came onto the radio. "Fireteam Nebula to \_Infinity\_. You reading this?" But there was no response.

A longer pause, but still no response. The spire was tall, imposing. It reminded Kahn of a picture in a book about Reach before the glassing . . . during the Winter Contingency. He started. "That's a Covenant cloaking tower. I remember that they were used on Reach as staging points to steal information about Earth. No wonder Roland didn't find this place earlier.

"That blue energy dome projects a "dead-zone" that communications cannot go through, except, apparently, the energy pulse as Requiem began its self-destruct sequence. We need to destroy the spire and get a message to Stephenson."

Pearlman flashed her green. "Let me guess. The override is at the



top. And look here." An objective marker appeared and Kahn zoomed in on it.

Although the view was fuzzy, Kahn could make out an Elite in blue armour with a glowing helmet. "Jul 'Mdama," Kahn whispered in an awed voice. Finding 'Mdama was like "finding a needle in the Requiem haystack", as Palmer put it. Then the way 'Mdama was moving caught Kahn's eye. He squinted as 'Mdama shifted. Kahn gasped audibly. A frail figure in blue was situated in his arms. It didn't take much work to figure out who it was.

"We have to get down to her!"

Pearlman shook her head. "Normally, I'd agree with you, but there are only two of us. Yes, the short definition of a SPARTAN is 'We do the impossible,' but if we fall - and in an army of that magnitude, we will - no one will know Halsey was here. We need to destroy that spire." Pearlman took a running leap and activated her Float Pack. She began drifting toward the spire, and Kahn followed suit.

After a minute of drifting, Pearlman adjusted her angle and flew to the lip on the top of the spire. She landed in a crouch, magnum pointed. Kahn landed next to her and promptly shot a curious Grunt in the head as it stepped out of the spire's control room to investigate the noise of the landings.

The pair walked in. An Elite stood at a control console, plugging numbers. Pearlman tackled it and twisted. Kahn heard a resounding crack as the Elite's neck broke. Kahn ran up to the controls and glanced at the controls. Aiming carefully, he slammed a fist into the device, and it began to spark.

Kahn turned away from the control panel in time to see Pearlman launch the last of her fuel rods at the feet of an Elite. Kahn grabbed his own cannon and fired his last shot. The Elite died in the green explosion, but it was too late.

It had growled something unintelligible, but clearly understood by the Promethean Knight that warped in right next to Kahn. He backpedalled, shooting at the Knight Commander, but its shields were just too strong. Pearlman joined in, peppering it with Magnum bursts. The shields dissolved as the Knight fired its scattershot at Kahn. The hard light punched right through his armour, and he could tell that the emergency biofoam his suit administered wouldn't be enough. He collapsed.

\* \* \*

><p>When Kahn came to a minute later, Pearlman was kneeling by him. Kahn could see the remnants of the Knight as it dissolved.<p>

"Blow the suit and get to safety," Kahn croaked.

"What?"

"You heard me. Blow the suit. Tell them what happened here. And then mark me MIA."

"Why?"

"Because humanity needs heroes. We are the struggle for freedom. We represent the human spirit. When Heracles died, his soul was carried up to Olympus on the smoke of his pyre. He became an immortal, destined to watch over the Greeks even after death.

"Do the same for me. Eliminate all traces of my passing. Humanity needs to be reassured that even when we aren't really there, we are still riding war chargers somewhere, marking those destined to die in battle."

"Like the Valkyries."

"Yes. Like the Valkyries. Immortal, undying, the shield-bearers for gods, reapers of men, slayers of evil. Mark me as Missing In Action. I may not be there, but I can still ride ahead, arbiter of life and death.

Don't let them think otherwise."

Arianna nodded. Raj watched as, with shaking fingers, she flipped open the access panel on his left arm and punched in the eight digit code. There was a quiet beep.

Her voice was fragile. "It's done."

Raj nodded his thanks. "I'll see you later, but now, now I am going to find Juliette, and Marcus, and Edward.

"When the thunder comes, do not weep. It heralds the Storm, yes, but we, we are the rain, the wind, the lightning in the sky. Together, we shall hold the hordes of hell, beat back the black beast, unseat the unconquerable. Together, we shall fight for humanity from afar, waiting for you.

"Now go! You have been called on to serve, but not just yet."

\* \* \*

><p><strong>AN: Well, this is the last official chapter, but I am going to add an epilogue, so stick around for that. Oh, and this time, Kahn's suit will blow using the built in detonation code that has a blast radius of about 10 metres as opposed to the modified fusion reactor bomb the he built (like in Batman: Dark Knight Rises).\*\*

\*\*Yes, the detonator uses the fusion pack, but it isn't modified like Kahn's bomb. For story purposes, Mark VI failsafe detonations have undergone some modifications as compared to the Mark V, notably time before detonation.\*\*

\*\*And it feels as though Kahn's speech would be something he was thinking but just wouldn't dare say. What do you think? Is he too OOC? Because I do not want to remove his speech. In fact, I kind of want parts of his speech on my grave.\*\*

\*\*Please inform me of any mistakes, no matter how small. I want this polished. It will undergo editing once I finish the epilogue.\*\*

## 18. Epilogue

**\*\*A/N:** Well, this is the epilogue. It has been a great run. Thank you for reading. After I post this, I will be doing some general editing, so pointing out **\*\*\*\*\_any\_\*\*\*\*** error for me, no matter how small, would be much appreciated. Also, if anyone knows capitalisation convention for weapons, please tell me. It would be much appreciated.\*\*

**\*\*Disclaimer:** I am in no way affiliated with Microsoft, Bungie, or 343 Industries. This is for my enjoyment and, hopefully, the enjoyment of others. I do not receive a profit.\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>Epilogue<p>

\* \* \*

><p>Stephenson took a deep breath and adjusted his dress blues. He stepped through the sliding door onto the rear observation deck. The room was nearly empty, just an endless void of stars. The transperisteel windows would provide a stunning view of Requiem's sun in a few hours when the *<em>Infinity<em>* orbited around it, putting the rear observation deck in line with the sun. Or it would if Requiem wasn't being pulled into the sun.

The only things blocking the view were captain Lasky and Roland's glowing avatar. Stephenson opened his mouth but was cut off by Lasky. "I'm sure you're wondering why I called you here in dress blues. As of three hours ago, the last member of Fireteam Nebula went dark."

"I know. I'm sorry. I guess that I'm just not ready to lead a Fireteam."

Lasky seemed to smile a moment before responding. "That's why this burden falls on me, not Sarah. You did well. I don't think that Sarah could have told you that, even if it's true."

"Nebula wasn't the perfect fireteam, but you made them work anyway. They weren't Fireteam Crimson, but then again, no one is; only Crimson has that honour."

Thank you, but what does that have to do with your calling me here in uniform? Is this Nebula's funeral?"

A small chuckle from the otherwise formal Roland. Lasky answered. "No. Because SPARTANS don't have funerals. And because every member is marked as MIA."

"Really?"

"Yes. After Nebula had fallen off radar for half-an-hour, protocol dictated that as a non-Rouge team, they were to be declared MIA and assumed captured or killed."

"However, I did order Roland to do occasional sweeps of the area, just in case. Although he can run dozens-"

Roland's avatar grinned. "Hundreds."

Lasky threw up his hands. "Fine Roland. Although Roland can run hundreds of programs, he also as hundreds of tasks. I ordered eight minute cycles with a one minute sweep in between. Shortly after the seventh sweep, Roland's comms were suddenly filled with massive data input."

Roland took over the story, and his synthetic voice was quite soothing. "At first, the data was only white noise, like the detonation of several unstable plasma cores. There's a ninety-three percent chance that the destabilization was caused by a smaller explosion two point one four seconds before. Its identity is unknown, and we won't be able to send a team in to check it out since we are currently heading into the sun.

"Shortly after, I intercepted a large amount of Covenant chatter from the area known as Singularity. I can't make sense out of any of it. Translated, all it discusses is biblical references. Adam and Eve, exodus, demons going to hell to regroup, even a bit about the Roman god Janus. As near as I can tell, the Librarian is Eve, but beyond that, even a super-advanced calculator like myself is stymied. Maybe if I had . . ."

Lasky interrupted Roland's ramblings. "One data stream that he \_was\_ able to crack was a message from SPARTAN Pearlman.

"Roland, play the tape."

"Will do, boss." Roland's holographic fingers made an audible \_snap\_ and a tinny female voice began to play through the speakers. Stephenson recognised it as Pearlman's.

\* \* \*

><p>Log of Voice Recording sent to <em>Infinity<em> at 16:52:34  
Arbitrary Ship Time

SPARTAN 1089: \_Infinity\_, this is Pearlman. I am the last of us. Brady went MIA shortly before we blew up an asteroid. Reynolds fell off a cliff, but might have survived. Quin went into space grappling with an Elite. He might have survived, so Niven disappeared when she began to look for him. Kahn . . . I couldn't find Kahn in the wreckage of the cloaking spire.

SPARTAN 1089: But I did find Halsey. I wade through an army to meet her, but I do not expect to return. Still, sing me no requiem, for dying is not part of the job. I still live, but you won't find me. I go to find the rest of Nebula and you won't find them either.

Unknown [Translated from Covenant Dialect]: Ashes to ashes, demon! We shall strip your title from you and watch as you are cast into the deepest pits of your own hell! You shall be cleansed, nay, purged!

SPARTAN 1089: Shut it! You broke my planet. Now, I break you. And then I'll start you on your Great Journey.

\_various sounds, notably gunfire\_

End of Log

\* \* \*

><p><strong>AN: And thus ends my first ever story. I will be editing it, so help pointing out errors is appreciated. In that vein, which of the main characters seems most Mary Sueish and why? I would appreciate answers so that I can work on the character(s).\*\*

\*\*Thank you.\*\*

\*\*Now that this is over, I will be updating 'Drifting By and By', so check that out.\*\*

End  
file.